A Treatise on Mental Prayer

Louis de Ponte, S.J.

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A TREATISE ON MENTAL PRAYER

A Treatise on Mental Prayer

By

The Ven. Louis de Ponte, S.J.

Adapted by

A Religious of the Order of St. Benedict

With an Introduction by

The Most Rev. Alban Goodier, S.J.

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PREFACE

A FEW words of introduction appear necessary to explain how a new "Treatise" by so well-known a writer as Father de Ponte, S.J., could at this date be placed before the public. In point of fact, there is nothing new in it. The six most valuable volumes of *Meditations* by that author having fallen somewhat into disuse, at any rate among the younger generation of religious, and not being easily obtainable by pious persons in the world, it seemed a useful task to blend together into one whole the "Introductions" to each of these six volumes. The matter has been slightly abridged and the English a little modernised, the translation used being that published by Richardson in 1852, itself a "modernised" version of the original early seventeenth-century translation of John Heigham. No substantial changes or omissions have been made beyond what was necessary to enable the treatise to stand alone apart from the *Meditations*.

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INTRODUCTION

IGNATIAN PRAYER AS TAUGHT BY DE PONTE

PROBABLY there is no better exponent of what is called the Ignatian Method of Prayer than the Ven. Fr. Louis de Ponte, S.J. He lived at a time (1554–1624) when the tradition of the Society of Jesus concerning prayer was still unimpaired; also at a time when by members of the Society itself it was being hotly discussed. As in all institutions devoted to the Mixed Life, among the Jesuit fathers immediately after the death of their Founder (1556) two camps had been forming; one emphasising the importance, and even the predominance of prayer, the other insisting more on the sacrifice of labour. In the former school, which St Ignatius himself had by no means discouraged, the ideal tended to be the mystic, work among men being looked on only as an overflow; in the latter, work was the chief matter of importance, and prayer was to be adapted almost entirely to this end.

An echo of this controversy may be heard in the great book on Prayer by Alvarez de Paz. In that large folio, when the author has described the prayer best suited to the Purgative Way and is passing to the Illuminative, he pauses to administer a sharp castigation on those who would confine

prayer within fixed boundaries, no matter for whom they prescribe. In this castigation he specially refers to members of his own Order, telling them very plainly that by so doing they by no means express the mind of their Founder, nor the spirit of their Institute. The Jesuit's prayer, he insists, is as free as any other. It aims at the highest form that man can hope to attain ; in many instances it attains it, and that without the least prejudice to the end of the Society, the Greater Glory of God and the Universal Good. Then, through hundreds of folio pages, he draws up forms of meditation, on similar lines it is true, but altogether different from the so-called Ignatian method, the difference increasing when he comes to the Unitive Way.

It is further to be noticed that the spiritual writers of the Society, during that period and indeed ever after, are all on the side of Alvarez ; those who have made too much of the Ignatian form as such have either not been Jesuits, and have written as it were at second hand, or, if they have been of the Society, have so overwhelmed it with prayer of affection and colloquy that the form itself has been almost lost. Among these latter writers Father Louis de Ponte is pre-eminent. Even more than Alvarez de Paz he clings to the form sanctioned by St Ignatius, but not less than de Paz he insists, from the very beginning, on the subservience of that form to every movement of the soul.

Prayer to him was anything but an intellectual exercise; it was a life on another plane, in another sphere, to which the soul had found its way. There it had awakened, seen its own unfitness for such a place, become overwhelmed with the glory around it, and expressed itself in terms that naturally came from it, in humility, in adoration, in petition, and all that followed from these.

This is the value of the little book which is here given to the soul that would make progress in prayer. Father de Ponte mentions his master, Ignatius, but only in the company of many more; it does not occur to him that there is any real difference between his method and that of any other. He does not speak of the points, memory, understanding, and will; he says the use of these faculties is the first degree of mental prayer. They are the means by which the soul ascends to God; when it has reached him, and begins to hold converse with him, then the object of mental prayer has been attained. We may notice how the author strives to stimulate this converse, by all kinds of suggestions which will "rather move our own hearts to ask with fervour than induce God to hear us." He sums up his teaching in the words of St Augustine: Meditatio parit scientiam, scientia compunctionem, compunctio devotionem, devotio perficit orationem; and sees in this summary a sufficiently perfect description of the "method" he has set out to describe.

In consequence we are not surprised that where de Ponte dwells on the ways of speaking with God, there he is specially illuminating. He shows us the use of vocal prayer as a help to meditation; while he dwells most on prayer of the heart, he provides us with the means by which the heart may find expression. Thus he makes much of ejaculatory prayers; he takes them from many sources, but most of all from the Scriptures, always keeping in mind that which the soul wants to say, and which unless it is allowed to utter it, may easily be lost in the air without aim and may perish.

At the same time de Ponte is careful not to allow the beginner at least to make his prayer in disorder. While the soul is in fervour spontaneity may succeed; but there come dull times, for many souls the dull times are longer than the times of fervour, and it is needful to prepare to meet them. Hence the care he would have a soul take before prayer. It must get itself ready; remotely, by its attention to a virtuous life, immediately, by knowing beforehand what subject it should discuss with its Lord, at the beginning of the prayer itself, by the utmost reverence in the presence of him in whose presence it stands. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else, we have a clear echo of the teaching of his master; if St Ignatius has added anything to the common doctrine and practice of prayer, it is the careful and prolonged introduction which he never tires of

repeating, the conscious presence of God, adverted to, acknowledged, expressed in some form, precisely as men do when they come into the presence of any other man whom they revere.

When he comes to the actual exercise of meditation his teaching is still the same. The great matter to be sought is intercourse between the soul and God, not so much light and learning for the intellect; the latter is only of value in so far as it promotes the former. Sometimes God himself speaks to the soul, and then all is easy; the "points" may be dispensed with, for their object has been gained without them. But sometimes, and for many perhaps more often, he would see how much the soul is willing to pay for this intercourse; then the "points" are useful, exercising the memory, giving the intellect that on which it may work, stimulating the will till it utters those affections which it knows to be true, however little at the moment it may feel them. Thus he writes:

"It should be noticed that when the Holy Spirit moves us to pray with special inspiration, all is easy and sweet; for he refreshes the memory, enkindles the affections, grants the petitions, disposes the colloquies, and perfects the whole work of prayer, we ourselves co-operating without trouble. But when this special succour is wanting, we must ourselves, using our free-will with the assistance of grace, which never fails us,

apply our faculties to exercise their acts in the form we have given, by which we invite the Holy Spirit to aid us with the special succour of his inspirations. For spiritual men should not be like ships of high building which cannot sail without wind, but rather like galleys that navigate both with the wind and the oar; when they lose the wind of divine inspiration, they must navigate with the oar of their own faculties, aided by divine favour, which may not however be sensible. This kind of prayer is often most profitable, though less pleasing, on account of its greater merit in fighting against distractions and dryness of heart. And if we persevere, using the oars of prayer, in his time Christ our Lord will come to visit us, with whose visitation this tempest will cease."

With this object in view we may see how de Ponte, while he does not neglect suggestions that may help the memory and intellect, yet is much more lavish, from beginning to end, with stimulants for the will and its affections. He recognises that for some, even beginners, the method of the understanding may be of little use; on the other hand, he warns those with vivid imaginations that their imaginings may easily be a hindrance rather than a help to prayer. He asks that the method should be seriously tested, that is all; and by that he means, not a casual attempt made by oneself at haphazard and with only half a heart,

but over a long space of time, with what assistance the exercitant can get, and with an effort to stir faculties that have long been dormant, or, perhaps, have never been exercised in this way before. Thus he would have the whole soul used in prayer; and he is confident that, after such a training, not only will the memory and intellect not interfere with the will and its affections, but they will stir them to much more, by opening out to them fresh visions and fields on which they may be exercised.

All this becomes much more clear and insistent when he comes to speak of the Illuminative Way. In the first place, like most spiritual writers whose teaching is built on experience rather than on theory, he will not make a sharp distinction between Beginners and Proficients, between the Purgative Way and the Illuminative; just as, later, he will not sharply distinguish between the Illuminative Way and the Unitive. The one blends into the other. With some it is a question of time, the earlier effort giving way to something more positive; with others it is a matter of their nature, the second degree being to them far more congenial, and therefore likely to be more fruitful, than the first; but with all alike, beginners, proficients, and perfect souls, the object is always the same. He will have them all speak to God; he will have them listen to him when he speaks to them; he will have them turn all their lives

into prayer, bending them and shaping them according to the light they have received in their contemplation.

At this point it is worthy of note that de Ponte enters into a long discussion concerning what are called the Active, the Contemplative, and the Mixed lives; a discussion which occupies a quarter of the whole treatise. In it he says nothing very new; what he lays down is drawn from the Fathers and earlier theologians, especially St Thomas; but the passage is of interest, perhaps, chiefly because of its historical significance. Evidently he has in mind the controversy of which we have already spoken. The Dominican fathers had gone through the same crisis in their day; at the very time in which de Ponte was writing, the Carmelites of St Teresa and St John of the Cross were going through the same, though in their case it was a battle in defence of the contemplative ideal. With admirable clarity and insight de Ponte explains the beauty and sanctity of each kind of vocation; he will not allow that one is less holy than another. The Active vocation seeks to prepare a home for Christ in this world, to welcome him when he comes, and then to find for him other homes in which he may dwell. The Contemplative would draw near to him, would sit, like Mary Magdalen, in quiet at his feet, content to hear his word and to live upon it.

But before he goes further he delays for a

long time on the connexion between these two; and here he is plainly, without any concealment, on the side of the contemplative. Without some influx of the contemplative life the active life is almost useless; of itself it is not sufficient. On the other hand, the complaints that are made against the life of contemplation are wholly without foundation. It is not true that the contemplative is idle, or of little profit; the words in which he condemns this argument show that he has a definite antagonist in mind. He calls it "a complaint palpably erroneous, and coming from very inexperienced persons, who will needs direct all by the same way in which they themselves walk," and scarcely condescends to give any further answer.

There is more to the same effect, pointing out the weakness and dangers of the active life, dwelling on the excellences of the contemplative, and on the "unum necessarium," to which he devotes a chapter. He adds the significant assertion:

"Whomsoever he has called by a special vocation to this sort of life, he on his part never takes it from them, nor desires that others should take it from them, nor that they should suffer themselves to be withdrawn by any persuasions, or apparent human reasons, but wills that they should persevere in their vocation until death.

"Secondly, those whom he has once drawn by his inspiration and motion to this sovereign

exercise, he never withdraws from it, nor desires that others withdraw them, on any pretext whatever. . . .

"Lastly, never will Almighty God take contemplation away from his elect here below, but will perfect it. For although death causes the works of the active life to cease, yet neither ceases, nor shall ever cease, the contemplation of God in which consist felicity and life eternal."

In all this de Ponte is saying nothing new. He is at one with all the other Jesuit writers before his time, from St Ignatius downward; though perhaps no one before him has so clearly expressed the meaning of the Mixed Life, as he expresses it in the following sentence. The Mixed Life, to him, is not so much a combination of the other two; it is rather an overflow of the life contemplative, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," expressing itself in "Thou shalt love thy neighbour." He says:

"The contemplative life, when it is perfected by the love of God, presently engenders a great love of our neighbour and zeal for his perfection, which, as the holy fathers say, is the most precious gift we can offer to Jesus Christ, becoming his co-adjutors in the conquest of souls; and this in such a manner that the self-same contemplation, in order to accomplish the will of God, interrupts her own works to gain souls which shall love and glorify the same God."

Readers of the same author's life of Father Balthasar Alvarez will easily see how he has used that life to illustrate this thesis. To him Father Balthasar was, in many ways, the ideal of a Jesuit. His life was full of labour; he held the highest and most engrossing offices; yet to de Ponte he appears as essentially a man of prayer, even of the highest degrees of prayer, on which background his work, abundant as it is, stands out almost as a quite minor detail. Father Balthasar's bent, as de Ponte describes him, was to prayer rather than to action; his danger, if there were any, lay more in excessive prayer than in excessive work; to understand his mind his biographer finds it necessary to enter into a most careful analysis of the highest forms of contemplation.

When, then, he comes in the volume here before us, to discuss the prayer of the Unitive Way, we feel that he writes as on a subject that he knows. Even when he speaks of the Passion, he is inclined to place it with the higher forms of prayer, rather than with the forms of the second degree; to him it is a prayer almost entirely of affection, with the readiness to suffer that comes from it. "To discomfort ourselves with him is not one of the least of comforts," he writes; in other words, the contemplation of the Passion produces in him effects that are close akin to "the joy of the Lord," which is the final goal of all sublimest prayer. With this

object in view he is more careful here than anywhere else to set the contemplative in the right direction. He points out the difference in dispositions required in one who would meditate on the Passion from those of one who meditates on the Public Life; and if in the former he has almost lost the matter of the meditation in colloquy, now he seems to have little use for the matter except in so far as it stirs in the soul overwhelming affection and affections. Before it begins these meditations the soul must be humble; it must be full of confidence in the mercy of God, as if it were entering on a great ordeal; it must be fervent and diligent; it must be crowned with great purity of heart; we feel the author carefully discriminating at this point, selecting those who are to go with him to the wonderful land beyond.

Then he steps across the border. At once, in spite of the warning he has just given, he utters a characteristic word of welcome. He is about to speak of the Unitive Way, of the highest forms of contemplation, yet will he have no one lay it aside as not for him, not even the first beginners. "Although this union belongs peculiarly to the perfect," he says in his introductory paragraph, "yet all ought to aspire to, and exercise themselves in it, even new beginners"; and he proceeds to show, by an analysis of the union desired, how it is within the reach of all. As we read this analysis, and feel its application to the life of the soul by the

author step by step, we ask ourselves whether anyone has made prayer appear more natural, or more easy, or more attractive, even that higher form of prayer of which he here speaks.

Nevertheless, in treating of prayer of the Unitive Way, de Ponte says comparatively little about mysticism, or about what are known as the mystical states. Of course, in a book that professes to provide material and guidance for regular daily prayer, this need not surprise us. At the same time, knowing as we do from other sources how intimately the author was acquainted with these states, both in himself and in others whom he was called upon to guide, we might have expected some overflow, some outburst of emotion which would reveal him. Instead, we have a great simplification; he spends himself almost entirely on explaining the affections of love and gratitude, as if they were all that was required; as he says, "that burning love of Almighty God and that perfect union with him, which is the end and fulness of the Unitive Way." In all this, again, he is in perfect conformity with the Jesuit tradition of his time, and indeed of all time. As we have seen, he has extolled contemplation in a way that is second to none; he now invites everyone to ambition the prayer of union; but there he stops. He knows too well that mysticism as an ambition is a danger, and in another part of the book from which these chapters have

been taken he expressly says so; that the true form comes from God and is not to be attained by man's own efforts only; and that for one true mystic worth the name there were, as St Ignatius said, ninety, perhaps even ninety-nine, whose mysticism was unsound.

Therefore, like his contemporary St Teresa, in speaking of the prayer of union, he emphasises rather the part the soul must take in it; what may come from God he leaves alone. It must be "vehement, strong, and effectual"; it must be "insatiable, that is, not content with the little it does or suffers, although it spares itself in nothing"; it must be "stable, not changeable, fleeting from one thing to another like the slothful"; it must be "constant, persevering till death, without slackening or becoming lukewarm either through temptation or persecution, opposing invincible valour and courage." When we read the uncompromising firmness with which he speaks, we might almost imagine we were hearing St John of the Cross.

In conclusion, it may be worth while remarking that the chapters which make up this *Treatise on Mental Prayer* have been taken from Fr. de Ponte's large work, *Meditations*. That work is nothing more than an elaboration of the Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius, expanded to cover the whole year. As an exposition of the mind of the saint no work has had a greater vogue during

three centuries, in every part of the Christian world; among the Jesuit fathers themselves it is accepted as a classic. Nevertheless, throughout the work it is remarkable how very seldom St Ignatius Loyola is mentioned; though he expressly says he is following his Master, yet he invariably links him up with other masters of the spiritual life. Instead, the author continually falls back upon the Fathers, the early ascetics, such as Cassian, and the theologians, especially St Thomas. In other words, it does not seem to occur to him that there is any difference between what is called the "Ignatian Method" and any other; all that St Ignatius has done has been to provide a certain system or order in the subject-matter of prayer, which de Ponte has decided to use, and which in matter of fact is used by the Society of Jesus everywhere.

Secondly, while he thus assumes that the prayer of St Ignatius is the same as that of all who have taught before him, he is at pains, as these chapters bear witness, to establish its oneness with the prayer of his own time. St Teresa, St John of the Cross, Blessed John of Avila, to mention only the most conspicuous, were de Ponte's contemporaries, and de Ponte was familiar with them all; though he does not quote them, no one can fail to see the parallelism between his teaching and theirs. This only he seems to add. He believes in order, of thought, of affection, even of resolution; progress, for

most souls, is made step by step, even though from time to time there may be found those who traverse the whole course by a single bound. De Ponte provides for those latter, but he is more concerned to help those who must make their way to sanctity by ordinary routes.

✠ ALBAN GOODIER, S.J.

PART I

FOR BEGINNERS

The Introduction

So high and sovereign is the exercise of mental prayer, in which we meditate on the mysteries of our holy faith and converse familiarly with Almighty God, that the principal master of it can be no other than the Holy Ghost himself, who, as St John says (1 John ii 27), is the unction from whom we receive all things. By his inspiration it was that the holy fathers learnt it, and left us in their writings much counsel and teaching of great importance as to the best way of exercising ourselves in it, following always the guidance of this holy teacher. Availing myself of their doctrine and experience, I will here summarise the principal points included under mental prayer, endeavouring to be brief, clear and distinct, so that all may be able to understand what I say and reduce it to practice. If in anything I am found to be too brief, other doctors may be referred to, who have written more fully.

As proof and authority of all that I shall say, I will give in the margin the sources from which I have drawn my teaching. They are chiefly three: (i) The Holy Scriptures, the principal fountain of all spiritual science; in it is contained life everlasting,

and the most excellent means of obtaining a foretaste of it in this life and its full fruition hereafter. (ii) The holy fathers, who were the masters of mystical divinity, especially those who are most ancient and most illuminated by Almighty God, such as SS Dionysius, Basil, Augustine, Gregory, Cassian, Bernard and others. To these I shall add our father and founder Blessed Ignatius of glorious memory, following the teaching he left us in his book of *Spiritual Exercises*. This book, though little and brief, and written in a plain and simple style, is yet effectual in virtue, ardent in affections, lofty in meaning, comprehensive in teaching, embracing all the forms of prayer and contemplation.

(iii) To show how the piety and sovereign utility of mystical theology is founded upon the rigorous truth of scholastic divinity, my third source will be the school-doctors, of whom I will only mention here the angelical doctor St Thomas, who alone is worth ten thousand other witnesses; his master St Augustine, and his companion St Bonaventure. Still, notwithstanding the excellence of my guides, being but a man, I may easily err in what I write; my will is therefore that all shall be entirely subject to the correction of our holy mother the Catholic Church, the foundation and pillar of truth; from which whenever, either through ignorance or negligence, I may depart, I forthwith revoke whatever I have said.

CHAPTER I

ON THE NATURE OF MENTAL PRAYER

MENTAL prayer is the employment of the three faculties of the soul, *memory, understanding and will,* exercising by God's assistance their acts about those mysteries and truths which our holy Catholic Faith teaches; speaking interiorly to God our Lord, conversing familiarly with him, begging of him his gifts, and treating of all that is necessary for our salvation and perfection. From this we see that the substance of mental prayer consists chiefly in four things: (S.P. Ignatio in 1 exercitio primae heb.; St Tho. 2, 2, q. lxxxiii, art. 1, et q. clxxx, art. 1, 3, et 4, et 3 p. q. 31).

1 To fill our *memory* with the thought of Almighty God, with whom we are about to speak and treat; to have in mind also the mystery on which we intend to meditate, passing through our memory, briefly, but clearly and distinctly, the matter of the meditation as faith makes it known to us, dividing it into several points, as I shall presently explain. And lest this part of our prayer should prove too dry, we should assist ourselves with acts of faith, as lively

as we can make them, in the truths contained in the mystery, because it is God, who is truth itself, who has revealed them to us. In this way faith becomes a ladder by which we ascend to perfect knowledge, as says Isaias, "Unless you believe, you shall not understand." (Cap. vii, juxta Septuag. St Jer. *ibid.*)

2. To exercise our *intellect* in reasonings and considerations concerning the mystery, searching out the truths contained in it, with all its causes, effects and circumstances, considering each in detail one by one. In this way the understanding may form a true and complete conception of the mystery proposed for its meditation, and may be convinced and persuaded to receive and embrace those truths it has meditated, placing them before the will, so as to move that faculty to act in its turn.

3. This brings us to the third part of our prayer, in which the *will* should act freely, being drawn to various affections and virtuous acts by the considerations which have preceded. Some of these acts may have reference to ourselves, others to God our Lord; such as hatred of ourselves, sorrow for our sins, confusion at the sight of our own misery, love of God, trust in his mercy, praises of God, thanksgivings for benefits received, desires of obtaining true virtue, effectual purposes of performing good works and changing and amending our lives. We may also add acts of resignation

to the will of God, offering to do or suffer whatever God shall ordain, and so on. These acts we call affections, because they are to be made freely and spontaneously by the will, elicited by the previous labours of the understanding, and in these consists what we call substantial devotion, from which arise the spiritual peace and alacrity of the soul. It is for the sake of these acts of the understanding and the will, says St Thomas, that meditation and contemplation are chiefly to be undertaken; St John Damascene also calls it the "*ascensus mentis in Deum,*" an "ascending of our spirit to God," uniting with him by actual knowledge and love. (St Thom. 2, 2, q. lxxxii, art. 3, et q. clxxx, art. 5, ad 1; Lib. 3 de fide orthodoxa, c. 24.)

4. Lastly, we should offer petitions to God our Lord, speaking and conferring with him, asking of him those things the will has desired and the understanding has considered, and anything else of which we stand in need. This properly constitutes prayer, which is a humble, fervent, confident petition for such things as are needful for us and which we desire to obtain of our great God.

(i) These petitions and colloquies are to be directed sometimes to the eternal Father, sometimes to his only-begotten Son Jesus Christ, or to the most blessed Trinity, adducing reasons and claims which may move them to grant what we demand. Sometimes we may base our claim on the

nature of God himself, asking him, as he is God, to grant our prayer, for his goodness, or for the love he bears us; for the desire he has for our good, or the commandment he has given us to ask him; for the glory of his Name, that he may be praised by all creatures. Or we may make a kind of litany of his perfections and attributes, saying: "Grant me, Lord, what I ask for thy own sake," "for thy charity," "for thy mercy," "for thy liberality," "for thy wisdom," "thy immensity," "thy eternity" and so forth.

(ii) Other claims we may bring forward on Christ our Lord, true God and true man, as for instance by the remembrance of his Incarnation, his Nativity, his Circumcision, his Presentation in the Temple; by his flight into Egypt; his fasting; his hunger, cold and nakedness; by all the labour and fatigue of his preaching; again, by the sorrows, ignominies and torments of his Passion and death; alleging his sweat of blood, his imprisonment, scourging, thorns, nails, gall and vinegar and the rest; sometimes we may speak to the eternal Father, beseeching him to hear us for love of his Son, for that Son's perfect service of his Father and the pains that for his love he endured; at other times we may speak to the Son of God, reminding him of the love he bears us, of his office of Redeemer and Advocate, and of the great price he paid for our souls. Again, we may speak to the Holy Ghost, begging

the same things of him for the love he bears to Christ Jesus our Lord, and for his merits. In the same manner as before we may make a litany of the virtues of our Redeemer, alleging his humility of heart, his poverty of spirit, his meekness, obedience, patience, mercy, charity, and the rest.

(iii) Other claims may be founded on our own necessities and miseries, pleading before our Lord, like David, that we were conceived in sin (Ps. i 7), that we have disorderly passions, strong enemies, great dangers and occasions of sin, and that without him we are unable to do anything. We may also remind him that we are his creatures, made to his image and likeness (Ps. cxviii 73), that for this reason the Devil persecutes us and would destroy us; wherefore it appertains to him to protect and keep us. And in conclusion, we may recount our sins and miseries before God, bewailing them with great sorrow and compunction of heart, for the more we humble ourselves for them the more we incline our merciful God to pardon.

Besides all this, perfect men may sometimes allege with humility their past services to God in imitation of holy king Ezechias, who asked of God the prolongation of his life (4 Reg. xx 3), reminding him that he "had walked before him with a perfect heart," and as Christ our Lord also did in his prayer to his heavenly Father after the Last Supper. (John xvii 4.)

These three kinds of claims may also be mingled together after the manner in which David prayed when he said: "For thy Name's sake, O Lord, pardon my sin, for it is great." (Ps. xxiv 11.)

These and other similar reasons may be urged in prayer, rather to move our own hearts to ask with fervour than to induce God to hear us. For our Lord much more eagerly desires to hear us and to give us the good spirit we ask, than we long to receive it; seeing, as St Augustine says, "God would not have commanded us to ask of him if he had not a will and desire to grant our requests." (Lib. de Verbis Dni, et Serm. v. 29.) By this manner of asking we fulfil all that the apostle enjoins when he says that our petitions should be accompanied by three marvellous actions (Phil. iv 6)—with *prayer*, which may raise our mind and its affections to the presence of Almighty God;—with *supplication*, alleging reasons by which we may hope to be heard;—and with *thanksgiving*, for benefits received, bringing down on us fresh gifts and graces.

These are the principal points included in mental prayer, their order being thus given by St Augustine: "*Meditatio parit scientiam, scientia compunctionem, compunctio devotionem, devotio perficit orationem.*" (Lib. de Spiritu et Anima, cap. 70, qui ei tribuitur.) "Frequent meditation engenders science and a knowledge of oneself and of God; knowledge brings forth affections

of compunction for our sins and miseries; compunction awakens affections of devotion towards God for his greatness and his mercies; and devotion perfects prayer, making our spirit join itself lovingly to Almighty God, and to ask of him things right and fitting, and in such manner as is suitable to our condition."

It now remains to explain how all these things are to be performed, beginning with that which is most essential and necessary to prayer.

CHAPTER II

ON THE MANNER OF SPEAKING TO GOD IN MENTAL PRAYER

FROM what we have already said, it may be inferred that the essence or nature of mental prayer consists in speaking interiorly to God our Lord, and this for two principal ends.

1. To praise and bless him for what he is in himself, and to give him thanks for the benefits and rewards he bestows upon us, following the counsel of St Paul, who says: "Be ye filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms, and hymns, and spiritual canticles, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks always for all things, in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to God and the Father by him." (Eph. v 19; Col. iii 16; S. Th. Lectio 7 in Eph.) In these words the holy Apostle points out four divine affections by which we may raise our hearts to God our Lord; that is, psalms, hymns, spiritual canticles and thanksgiving.

(i) Interior "psalms" are acts of the love of God, accompanied by effectual desires and determinations to serve and obey him, and to keep as perfectly as we can his commandments and counsels. This is that

music of the soul called by David the "psaltery of ten strings" (Ps. xxxii 2): as he who plays on the psaltery or harp handles its ten strings sometimes singly, sometimes in chords, or even all together; so in the sweet music of prayer we should desire fervently to exercise the virtues of obedience, humility, patience and the like, now one, now another, sometimes all together. To these we should add a steadfast purpose of keeping God's commandments and counsels, in the same way considering now this one, now that, or all in general.

(ii) "Hymns" are affections of the praises of God, recounting his glories and perfections and all his glorious works, for which he is worthy to be praised and extolled by all his creatures. Sometimes we may say with the Seraphim: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts!" (Isa. vi 3), or instead of the word "holy" we may substitute "good," "merciful," "just," "wise," "powerful" . . . "art thou, my Lord, and most worthy to have thy sanctity and thy greatness magnified by the Seraphim." Sometimes we may say with the elders in the Apocalypse: "Worthy art thou, O Lamb of God who didst die for us, to receive power and divinity and wisdom and strength, glory and honour and benediction for ever and ever, Amen." (Apoc. iv 12.) Or with the children in the furnace (Dan. iii 57), we may invite all creatures to glorify God; or again, with holy David (Ps. x 1), excite our own souls

with all their faculties to bless and praise our Lord.

(iii) "Spiritual canticles" are affections of spiritual joy and gladness, rejoicing that God is who he is, and for the infinite good that he has in himself; for the glory given him by the saints in heaven; and for the services rendered him by the just on earth. We may rejoice within ourselves for the hope of our eternal reward and the longed-for possession of the bliss already enjoyed by the Blessed in heaven, making our own those words of the Apocalypse: "Alleluia! for the Lord our God Almighty hath reigned. Let us be glad and rejoice and give glory to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath prepared herself." (Apoc. xix 6.)

(iv) "Thanksgivings" are acts of gratitude for the benefits we have received from our Lord, often recounting them, and praising him for each. Not only should I thank him for the benefits I have myself received, but also for those he has conferred upon the Angels in heaven, upon all men on earth, upon the irrational creatures who know not how to thank him for themselves, and even for those bestowed upon the very devils and upon the damned, who have no will or desire to thank him.

With these four affections, then, may we speak to our Lord in prayer, our intention being his own greater glory; endeavouring, as St Paul tells us, to make the Holy Spirit

the source of our interior words, Christ Jesus our Saviour the middle, or mediator, and the Father Everlasting, the end and person to whom they are directed; although, as we have said, they may also at times be addressed to each of the three divine Persons.

2. The second intention we should have in speaking to God our Lord is to beg of him new spiritual gifts and graces, which may promote our own salvation and perfection as well as his greater glory. Such petitions and colloquies may take many forms, according to the present disposition of him who prays and converses with God.

Sometimes we may speak to him as a son speaks to his father, asking of him all such things as a good son may and ought to ask of a good father, in a spirit of love and confidence. This is the spirit of the Pater Noster, in which Christ our Lord himself instructs us as to what things we ought to ask.

Sometimes we must speak to God as would a poor wretch to a rich and kind-hearted man, begging an alms. This spirit we often find in David, who was wont to call himself "poor" and a "beggar" (Ps. xxiv 16; xxxix 18), soliciting spiritual alms of God, who as St Paul says, is "rich unto all that call upon him." (Rom. x 12.)

Again, we may speak to God as a sick man speaks to his physician, making known his malady, and seeking a remedy; or as a man that has a cause to plead, or a guilty wretch

before his judge, imploring a favourable sentence or begging pardon for his crime. In this case our colloquy should be accompanied by affections of humiliation, of contrition, of purposes of amendment, and of satisfaction.

Lastly, at other times we may speak to God in the docile spirit of a scholar to his master, desiring to have our ignorance instructed; or as one friend speaks to another concerning some weighty business, asking counsel, direction or aid. And if confidence and love shall make us so bold, our soul may address her God as the bride speaks to her spouse, after the manner of the Canticle of Canticles.

In all these ways we may speak to God our Lord in prayer, clothing ourselves with such affections, and choosing sometimes one, sometimes another, for all are becoming for us to use when communing with our God, who is our physician, our friend, the spouse of our souls. Most true it is that our petitions and colloquies depend chiefly on the motions of the Holy Ghost who, as St Paul says, "asks for us with unspeakable groanings" (Rom. viii 26), for by his inspirations he teaches us and moves us to ask, ordering our petitions and stirring up the affections with which they are to be made, for devotion, as St Bernard says, is the "tongue of the soul" (Serm. xlv in Cant.), which whosoever possesses is very skilful in speaking and conversing with the Eternal Word.

But for all this, we, on our part, must help ourselves and learn how to treat and confer with Almighty God, following the directions which have here been laid down.

To which I would add, that though prayer is properly speech and colloquy with our Lord, we may, notwithstanding, speak in it to ourselves and confer with our own soul; sometimes, as St Paul says, exhorting ourselves (Col. iii 16), and exciting ourselves to fresh fervour by our affections and petitions; at other times reproaching ourselves for our want of zeal, being ashamed that we serve Almighty God so negligently. Thus did David frequently admonish himself, saying: "Why art thou cast down, my soul? Why dost thou disquiet me? Hope thou in God, for I will still give praise to him, the salvation of my countenance and my God." (Ps. xli 12; xlii 5.) "Be thou, my soul, subject to God; for from him is my patience." (Ps. lxi 6.) From such colloquies as these we should go on to speak to God himself, as did the prodigal son when he spoke to himself, saying: "How many hired servants in my father's house abound with bread, and I here perish with hunger! I will arise and will go to my father, and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, I am not now worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants." (Lk. xv 21.)

Finally, our prayer may be directed to our Blessed Lady, and to the angels and

saints, for the same two ends: either to praise and bless them for their sanctity and virtues, and the benefits they procure for us, or to ask them to aid and assist us in the great affair of our salvation. We may also adduce some of the motives given in the preceding chapter, or special ones suited to particular saints. To the most holy Virgin we may allege that she is our mother and the advocatrix of sinners, and that her Son has given us into her care; reminding her also of the love she bears him and her desire that all should love and serve him. We may implore her to exercise her office of mother and mediatrix on our behalf, that we may the better serve him whom she so dearly loves. We may beg our angel guardian in fulfilment of his office to present our prayers to God and obtain for us a favourable hearing, for his honour is concerned in our being good here below and attaining our wished-for reward in heaven; reminding him that as the Devil sleeps not, but watches continually in order to tempt us, so it is his care to be ever watchful to defend us. In like manner we may speak to any of the saints, whose feasts occur or to whom we have a special devotion; and this rather to stir up devotion in our own hearts than to arouse it in them, for as they love us and desire our salvation, so are they most willing to help us all they can.

CHAPTER III

ON THE VIRTUES WHICH SHOULD ACCOMPANY MENTAL PRAYER

By what has been explained in the two foregoing chapters, it is easy to see how excellent a thing is mental prayer, in which are exercised so many and such heroic acts of the principal virtues. On this account St John Chrysostom said with great reason, that "as when a queen enters into a city there enter with her, in her company, many ladies and noblemen of the Court, besides her guard and innumerable people that follow her; so when prayer enters into the soul, there enter with her all the virtues that accompany the spirit of prayer." (Lib. de orand. Deo, ad finem.) Some virtues go before, preparing the way and disposing the soul to pray as it ought, such as faith, humility, reverence and purity of intention; according to that saying of the Wise Man: "Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as a man that tempteth God." (Ecclus. xviii 23.) Other virtues go side by side with prayer, such as charity, wisdom, devotion and religion, and those other gifts of the Holy Ghost which illuminate the understanding and aid marvellously to prayer.

Innumerable other virtues follow after, that is fervent desires and purposes of all that is good in matters of obedience and patience, temperance, modesty, chastity, and the rest. And all these, interlacing themselves with prayer, exercise among themselves different acts by which they adorn one another; for humility joins herself with confidence and charity; charity with religion and thanksgiving; religion with obedience and resignation; and thus with a celestial and divine accord they make a harmony of many voices. For this reason many holy Fathers say that prayer makes men like angels, not only because it is a work of the superior faculties, in which men resemble them, but because it communicates to men an angelic life, full of purity and sanctity. "For there can be nothing", says St John Chrysostom, "more wise, more holy or more just than a man who speaks to God as it is meet for him to do. For from God he receives abundantly those gifts and graces in which consist true wisdom and perfect justice and sanctity." (Lib. i. de orando Deo.) The reason of this is that as our Lord is very sweet and gentle, and inspires us to pray, he speaks to us when we speak to him, and converses familiarly with those who enter into their heart to treat and converse with him. And the conversation of God is not words alone, but also works; for, as St Bernard says, "*Locutio verbi est infusio doni.*" (Serm. xlv. in Cant.) "For God to speak is to communicate gifts

infusing his graces and virtues upon them to whom he speaks" ; filling them with that "joy unspeakable" (1 Peter i 8) and with that "peace that surpasses all understanding." (Phil. iv 7.) As David also saith, "I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me ; for he will speak peace unto his people, and unto his saints, and unto them that are converted unto the heart." (Ps. lxxxiv 9.) For this reason we should so speak to God in prayer as to be attentive to listen to what he will say to us by his inspirations, to obey them, and to dispose ourselves to receive those gifts which thereby he intends to communicate to us.

All this goes to show the excellence and necessity of mental prayer, of which Cassian says that it has such a connection with all virtues that neither can *they* be perfectly obtained nor preserved without prayer, nor perfect prayer be obtained without *them ;* for it is, says he, the end of all, and to it are directed all the labours and pains we take to gain them ; inasmuch as prayer in its perfect degree embraces union with God, by means of actual knowledge and love, with great joy in possessing him. (Coll. ix, c. 1.) Hence it arises that God (as says St John Climacus) in prayer pays ready money a hundred times the double of that which is renounced or endured for his sake, besides giving great pledges of the last reward that is to be given in life everlasting. (Grad. xxviii.) I might say many other things of

this sovereign virtue which I omit, because this is written for those that already desire to exercise it on account of the great estimation in which they hold it.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE MATTER OF MENTAL PRAYER FIT FOR MEDITATION

THE matter of mental prayer in which the three faculties of the soul (especially the understanding) are to exercise their acts, is all that God has revealed in the holy Scripture, especially the principal mysteries of our faith.

These mysteries may be reduced in general to three orders, suitable to the different states of those who meditate, among whom some are sinners who desire to rid themselves of their sins and evil inclinations, or beginners who wish to mortify their passions and the vices of their former life; and these walk in the way that we call *purgative*, whose end is to purify the soul of all these vices, and to obtain cleanness of heart. Others go more forward, becoming proficients in virtue, and these walk in the *illuminative* way, whose end is to enlighten the soul with the splendour and brightness of many truths and virtues, daily increasing in them. Others are already perfect, and have passed through these exercises, and these walk in that way we call *unitive* whose end is to unite and join our spirit

to Almighty God in the union of perfect love.

Each of these classes of persons should have matter of meditation suitable to his state and aim, from which they may draw forth the affections and purposes they require. And although such matter may be reduced to three orders of mysteries and truths, adapted to those three states and ways which have been described, yet for greater clearness we will divide them into six; assigning two to those that are beginners, two to the proficients, the other two to those that are most perfect.

1. Sinners who truly desire to be converted, to turn to God, and to change their life are to take for their matter of meditation their own sins, and all those things which may help them to know their number and enormity, or that may cause detestation for them and sorrow for having committed them. And as fear is usually the beginning of justification, whatever awakens this fear is suitable matter of meditation for them; such are the four last things, death, judgement, hell, and suchlike.

2. Those who have already turned to God and are desirous of treasuring up virtues and to increase in them, are to take for their special matter of meditation the mysteries of the humanity of our Lord Jesus Christ whilst he lived in this mortal life; because his life and doctrine, his Passion and death, formed a most perfect pattern of all virtues

for all classes of the just, although in a different manner; for, as say St Augustine and St Thomas, charity, when it is begotten and is born by means of penances, has those three states of which we have spoken, namely, of spiritual childhood, of increase and of perfection.

The newly justified, which are the beginners, and infants newly-begotten in the life of grace, are to take for their matter of meditation the mysteries of the incarnation and childhood of our Saviour Jesus Christ, and in such meditations they will find sufficient motives both for prosecuting their journey along the purgative way, mortifying and purifying themselves from those vices and passions which have remained in them as the dregs of their former life, as well as to begin the journey of the illuminative way, treasuring up virtues contrary to their vices, and adapted to their state.

Those who are proficients and go on increasing in virtue, have two ways to do this—the one by *doing*, and the other by *suffering*; I mean, either by exercising different works of their own choice which belong to the active or contemplative life, or by suffering with great perfection the troubles, persecutions and afflictions which come from the hands of others. This way, though the sharper, is the most effectual for the increase of virtues, and the attainment of perfection.

In these two ways our Saviour walked with great perfection, of whom St Augustine

says that his life among men was to "do marvellous things and to suffer painful things," and all for our instruction. For this class of persons then, the best matter for meditation is the mysteries of the three years of our Lord's public life, from his baptism to his last entry into Jerusalem, and the mysteries of his Passion and death.

3. Finally, those who arrive at the state of perfection, walking in the unitive way, have two other paths by which to attain to the perfect union of love. The first is, by contemplating the glorious life of our Saviour Christ, and the wonderful works that he did after his resurrection, sending upon his disciples the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Love. The other way is by contemplating the mysteries of the Divinity and Trinity of God, his perfections and benefits.

Thus we learn that the meditations of these six parts are as the six wings of the Seraphim which God has on earth, like to those which the prophet Isaias saw (Isaias vi 2), with which they leave what is gross and earthly and fly to that which is celestial and heavenly; where after they have purified, illuminated and perfected themselves they fly likewise to purify, illuminate and perfect others, desiring that all should burn with the love with which they themselves burn; since these meditations conduce to all these ends, and in all of them ought all men to be exercised—even those that have

advanced furthest, though for a different end and in a different manner. For as, in the three degrees of souls, the vegetative proper to plants, the sensitive proper to brute beasts, and the reasonable proper to men, the superior, besides *his own* works, performs also the works of the *inferior*, though after a more excellent manner; so also, as St Thomas says, in the three classes of people that dedicate themselves to the service of God and to prayer, those who are proficients must exercise themselves in the meditations and works of beginners, and the perfect in those of both the other classes, yet after a more perfect manner, drawing out of them a more perfect mortification of themselves and a more excellent manner of imitating our Saviour Christ in his virtues. (2, 2, Art. ix, ad 3.)

Besides this, experience teaches that when a special affection for any virtue is predominant in a soul, from whatever it meditates it takes occasion to feed and augment itself. If the spirit of humility predominate, whether he meditate upon heaven or hell, whether he think upon his own miseries or upon the divine excellences, from all these he will draw forth affections of humility. And if in his heart the spirit of love predominate, though he should meditate upon judgement and hell, yet he converts it all into affections of love. So likewise beginners, proficients, and those that are perfect, upon whatsoever they meditate, will draw forth

those affections and purposes that are fitting to their state and to their needs.

Hence, although ordinarily we should observe the order here laid down, yet we need not be so tied to it that we cannot change when it seems desirable; for some cannot apply themselves to considerations of fear who are easily moved by meditations of love, and so on. Some find most devotion in considering the mysteries of our Saviour Christ; others in the mysteries of his Passion; some in one mystery, some in another; and it is not good to force them overmuch, nor to draw them from one consideration which helps them, to pass to another from which they may draw no profit. For this reason our Lord has provided such ample matter for meditation that everyone can find something suited to his taste and capacity.

CHAPTER V

HOW TO BEGIN OUR PRAYER

It is the counsel of the Holy Ghost before prayer to "prepare the soul"; (Ecclus. xviii 23) for to begin without preparation is as it were to *tempt God*, proposing the end and fruit of prayer without using the necessary means to obtain the same. We should, therefore, read over beforehand what we are going to meditate upon; for usually meditation cannot be attentive nor recollected if the matter be not prepared. Yet this need not hinder us, should our Lord by special inspiration move us to think upon something else, from following this impulse, leaving what we had prepared for another time; because the divine inspiration is the principal part of our prayer, and should be followed, provided that it is not from lightness of mind nor instability of heart that we jump from one thing to another without sufficient cause. This being premised, before we begin our meditation we are to perform the following acts:

(1) First, we are to lift up our hearts and the powers of our soul to God our Lord, beholding him there present with an interior, attentive, reverent and loving regard. For

if a man is to speak with a prince, it is necessary that he go to his palace or to the place where he is and present himself before him; for we cannot speak with one that is absent. But seeing that God is present in every place assisting all and beholding all, when I am about to pray and speak to him, I need not go to seek him in any other place but only to quicken my faith and to behold how he is here present, persuading myself that when I pray, I am not alone, but that there is present with me the most holy Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to whom I speak, who sees me, hears me, and is accustomed to answer within my heart by inspirations and illuminations, communicating the light of truth to the understanding, fervent affections of devotion to the will, and infusing gifts and virtues and other graces into the soul, as we have already said.

Sometimes I may behold God round about me, encompassing me on every side, and myself within him as the fishes are in the sea. Or as he is within me, by essence, presence and power, knowing what I do, and aiding me to do it. Thus is fulfilled that saying of our Lord Christ: "When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber," that is, into thy heart, "and having shut the door" of thy senses, "pray to thy heavenly Father in secret; and thy Father who" is there, and "seeth in secret, will repay thee" (Matt. vi 6), that is, will give thee what thou dost ask.

This truth of the presence of God within me and round about me when I am praying, I should try to make as real as I possibly can, that it may move me to reverence, confidence and attention. If this consideration moves my devotion, I may well linger over it as long as it lasts, for this is already a prayer, and a very good one. But usually this thought should not detain me longer than the space of a Paternoster, though all through my prayer I should try to keep the sense of the presence of God, renewing it during my petitions and colloquies, "pouring out," as David says, "my prayer in the sight of our Lord." (Ps. cxli 3.)

2. This done, I must make a great interior reverence to the majesty of God, my Lord and King. I must adore him *in spirit*, acknowledging him for my God and Lord, the Father of immense majesty and the King most worthy of infinite reverence; the attitude of *my body* should correspond with the interior reverence of my heart. Next I should make the sign of the cross, desiring our Lord to deliver me from those enemies that are wont to molest us in prayer, saying with affection, "By the sign of the cross, deliver us from our enemies, O God." I should follow this with the invocation of the Blessed Trinity, as one that intends to begin his prayer not in his own virtues, but by the help of the most Blessed Trinity. Some follow this up with a short act of contrition, others with thanksgiving, but although

everyone may use whatever is most conducive to his devotion, yet all should begin with a short prayer, preparatory, as it were, to that which we intend to do; in which we may beseech our Lord to direct our work to his honour and glory, and give grace necessary to perform it as he requires. This brief prayer I must offer to God our Lord, whom I behold as present, saying to him with great earnestness and affection of heart:

Colloquy.—I offer to thee, O Lord, whatever I shall here speak, think, or treat of, so that all may be performed purely to thy honour and glory; and I beseech thee, by what thou art, to assist me in this hour, so that I may assuredly pray in such manner as thou requirest, for the glory of thy most holy Name, and for the profit of my soul. Amen.

This manner of prayer may be directed to either of the three divine Persons as follows:

Sometimes to the eternal Father, saying: "Sovereign Father, I offer thee this my prayer, united and incorporated with that of thy only-begotten Son Christ Jesus our Lord, for whose sake I beseech thee to help me to pray in such manner as he prayed, that my prayer, as his was, may be acceptable to thee."

At other times to the Son of God, saying to him as did the Apostles: "My Redeemer and Master, teach me to pray, and help me to pray with attention, purity and fervour, like to that which thou hadst when thou

didst pray to thy Father, that my prayer, as thine was, may be acceptable to him."

Or again to the Holy Ghost, saying to him those words of St Paul: "Most Holy Spirit, I am an ignorant and wretched sinner, I know not what to pray for nor how to ask as I ought. Do thou, my God, ask within me, moving me to ask with groanings unspeakable, that my prayer may be acceptable, proceeding from so noble a beginning as thou art, to whom be glory and honour, world without end. Amen."

Thus we shall fulfil that saying of St Dionysius (c. 3. De Div. Nom.) that every theological or divine act (which beholds God or treats of him and with him) ought to begin with prayer, invoking and calling upon the favour of the Most Holy Trinity, who is present in every place, offering ourselves to him with pure petitions, with a recollected mind, and with an affection well disposed for the union at which we aim in this holy exercise.

CHAPTER VI

ON THE MANNER OF MEDITATING AND DISCOURSING IN PRAYER, AND HOW WE ARE TO RESIST THE DISTRACTIONS WHICH ASSAIL US

THE work of the understanding, which we call meditation, is one of the most hard and difficult which there is in mental prayer. For though it is easy to meditate upon all sorts of things, running from one to another without order or method, yet it is very difficult to meditate upon one thing alone with attention, having the memory and understanding fixed upon God, without being distracted and diverted to other things. Even the greatest saints were wont to be molested by this, and complain of it. We all have experience of this evil, and it proceeds from various roots and sources: (i) From the Devil, to hinder us from obtaining the fruits of prayer. (ii) From our own imagination, which is free, untamed, unstable and ill-governed. (iii) From unmortified affections, which draw our thoughts after them; for where our treasure is, there is also our heart. (iv) From cares which sting and divide the heart into a thousand parts. (v) From weakness and coldness,

through not applying our whole mind to this noble exercise. (vi) From ignorance, not knowing how to meditate or reason, or how to search out hidden truths, or to ponder them in such a way that they may move the will and stir up affections of devotion. This ignorance, by the favour of heaven, will be remedied by the form and method I shall here describe.

(i) In meditation, we are to ground ourselves thoroughly in the truth of the mystery we are considering, as faith reveals it to us, endeavouring to believe and understand it truly as it actually happened, or is made known to us. (ii) We should enquire the true causes from whence proceeded the matter we are meditating, excluding those which are false or only apparent. (iii) By reasoning we must search out the true ends for which it was ordained, excluding all others that are contrary. (iv) We should enquire the effects proceeding from the matter, that is, the good or harm that ensued. (v) Lastly, certain properties and circumstances that accompany it. This will be clearly understood by the following example.

If I would meditate upon the mysteries of the Incarnation, . . . (i) I must well consider and understand what our faith teaches : that is to say, that the Son of God joined to himself in unity of person our human nature, in such a way that God is truly man and man is God. (ii) I am to consider how the

causes of this work were not our merits, but only the bounty and mercy of Almighty God; and the *ends* were the redemption of the world, and the manifestation of his divine goodness and charity. (iii) I will consider the *profit* that came to us thereby, namely, pardon of sin, destruction of death, entrance into heaven, and suchlike; and then the *loss* we should have sustained if this work had not been done, remaining enemies of God, slaves of the Devil, and condemned to hell. (iv) The *circumstances* of this work touching *time*, *place* and *manner*; and what properties of body and soul Almighty God took when he became incarnate.

On each of these points the understanding is to make a pause, remaining in it as long as it shall find devotion and spiritual relish, without caring to pass to another, moving the will to various affections of love and confidence, as we have already said, making petitions and colloquies to our Lord according to what has been meditated and desired. And when our understanding has well considered one of these points, it may pass to another with the like calmness and quietness of mind, and so proceed with the rest.

It should be noticed that when the Holy Spirit moves us to pray with special inspiration, all is easy and sweet; for he refreshes the memory, enkindles the affections, grants the petitions, disposes the colloquies, and perfects the whole work of prayer, we ourselves co-operating without trouble. But

when this special succour is wanting, we must ourselves, using our free-will with the assistance of grace, which never fails us, apply our faculties to exercise their acts in the form we have given, by which we invite the Holy Spirit to aid us with the special succour of his inspirations. For spiritual men should not be like ships of high building which cannot sail without wind, but rather like galleys that navigate both with the wind and the oar; when they lose the wind of divine inspiration, they must navigate with the oar of their own faculties, aided by divine favour, which may not, however, be sensible. This kind of prayer is often most profitable, though less pleasing, on account of its greater merit in fighting against distractions and dryness of heart. And if we persevere, using the oars of prayer, in his time, Christ our Lord will come to visit us, with whose visitation this tempest will cease.

There are four principal weapons with which to fight against these distractions of heart:

1. The first is, profound *humility*, acknowledging ourselves to be weak and miserable, being ashamed of ourselves to stand in the presence of God with such distractions; and accusing ourselves of our offences past and present, for which we are now chastised; for whoever in this manner humbleth himself in prayer shall be in due time exalted. (Luc. xiv 11.)

2. The second is, *fortitude* of mind, making a manly resolution not wilfully to admit any thought that may hinder us in our prayer, even though it be very pleasing or seems to be of great importance; for at that time nothing is of such importance as that I attend to my prayer and to God, in whose presence I am to pray. When unwittingly I find myself diverted, I will turn again to tie the thread of the good thought and reasoning which I have begun, and if a thousand times I should find myself distracted, I will return a thousand times without losing my courage and confidence, remembering that Abraham, persevering in chasing away the importunate birds that approached to the sacrifice, came to sleep a mysterious sleep, in which God made known to him great secrets, and passed like fire through the midst of the sacrifice, in testimony that he accepted it. (Gen. xv 11.) So, labouring with perseverance to chase away importunate thoughts which disquiet me in the sacrifice of prayer, I shall come, with God's favour, to sleep the quiet sleep of contemplation, in which he may illuminate my soul with his light that I may know him, and inflame it with the fire of his love that I may love him.

3. The third weapon is *prayer* itself, beseeching our Lord to build in my soul a "city of Jerusalem" (Ps. cxlvi 2), that it may become a vision of peace, collecting my thoughts and wandering affections that they

may dwell there and busy themselves quietly in prayer. I will also ask the help of the holy angels, who assist those who pray. In this manner will I employ all my strength, for prayer is so powerful that it can obtain of God all things, and itself with them, using in the midst of them some brief prayers to this purpose, of which I may find many examples in the Psalms. And if I persevere crying, though it be with dryness and violence, our Lord Jesus Christ will not fail to have compassion on me, as he had on the blind man who would not be silenced.

4. The last weapon must be a great *confidence* in God our Lord, persuading ourselves that, seeing that he commands us to pray, he will give us the necessary help to perform it, and grace to resist the Devil, repress our passions, moderate our cares, and cast from us all lukewarmness, so that nothing may hinder us in the exercise of prayer. But with this confidence we must join diligence, endeavouring, as Cassian says, before prayer to remove all such occasions as we fear may distract us in it, imitating in this the subtlety of our enemy, who ordains all his temptations with the object of hindering us from prayer. For he tempts spiritual persons with gluttony in order to make them in prayer heavy and sleepy; he tempts them with impatience to disquiet them; with curiosity of the senses to distract them; with multitude of business to

disturb them; and with pride and ingratitude to make them dry.

Seeing, therefore, that we ought to be no less provident and careful of our good than the devil is to provoke us to evil, we should take great care so to order all the work and business of the day that all may help towards the good success of our prayer. Thus may we hope in some degree to fulfil that word of Christ our Saviour: "It behoveth always to pray and not to be weary" (Luke xviii 8); for he always prays who spends his whole time either in prayer or preparing for it. With confidence then should I enter upon my prayer, saying to the devils in the words of the Psalm, "Depart from me, ye malignant, and I will search the commandments of my God." (Ps. cxviii 115.) And to my powers, thoughts and affections I will say, "Come, let us adore and fall down and weep before the Lord that made us; he is our Lord God, and we are the people of his pasture and the sheep of his hand." (Ps. xciv 6.)

CHAPTER VII

HOW TO AID OURSELVES IN MENTAL PRAYER BY MEANS OF THE IMAGINATION, THE TONGUE AND THE OTHER FACULTIES

ALTHOUGH mental prayer, as has been said, is the work of the three supreme faculties of the soul, namely, the memory, the understanding and the will, yet the inferior faculties also aid in its exercise.

1. The first of these is the *imagination*, which, as when it is untamed and ill-regulated it notably hinders prayer, so also it may help much when it can with facility form within itself certain images and figures of the things to be meditated, as if they were really present. Thus it is good, at the beginning of our meditation, to endeavour to form within ourselves by help of the imagination some such figure or image of the things we intend to meditate with the greatest vividness and propriety we are able. So, if I am to meditate upon the birth of Christ, I will picture to myself some open place without shelter, and a child wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger; and so with the rest.

Yet notice that this is to be done without

fatiguing the head : for if anyone finds much difficulty in forming such figures, it were better to leave them alone, and use only the spiritual faculties in the manner already mentioned. On the other hand, those that are very imaginative must be prudent, because their lively imaginations may be to them an occasion of many illusions by supposing their imagination to be revelation and that the image they form within themselves is the thing itself which they imagine ; and so, through indiscretion they come to confuse their head and convert into a hindrance what should have been a help.

2. The *tongue* may likewise help in prayer, for (as St Thomas says) mental prayer and vocal are not contrary to one another but sisters that help one another. (2, 1, q. lxxxiii, art. 12.) Mental prayer is wont sometimes to break out into vocal, speaking to our Lord exterior words arising from interior fervour and devotion (Ps. xv 9) : and vocal prayer is used to quicken the soul, to make it more attentive to mental. Therefore, when in mental prayer we see ourselves to be distracted or dry, it is a good remedy to speak some words which may awaken and recollect us, either speaking to our Lord or to ourselves ; for as the body aids the soul, so the works of the body are accustomed to aid those of the soul ; and the exterior word, and that which the tongue speaks, helps to touch the heart. This may be practised in two ways :

(i) The first is, each one composing his words as his necessity or devotion shall dictate to him, not minding whether they be well- or ill-ordered: for our Lord regards rather the disposition of the heart and the fervour of the affections than the words; and he is better pleased with the stammering speeches of a child or a penitent sinner than the well-composed words of a learned man that is proud.

(ii) The other manner is saying some prayer made by another, as are those of the Church or of some saint, appropriating them to himself, and speaking them with the same feeling and affection as if he himself were composing them.

(iii) As for our bodily senses, there can be no certain rule given; for some find it best to keep their eyes shut, while others find more help by looking on some picture or raising their eyes to heaven. Some are troubled with hearing anything, while the devotion of others is inflamed by hearing music or singing; some excite their affections by striking themselves on the breast, as St Jerome did in imitation of the publican; others with much bending of the knee, and so on.

The same may be said of other motions or gestures of the body, as to stretch out the arms in the form of a cross, to lie prostrate on the ground, to stand fixed in one place, to walk about, or to sit in some lowly seat; in all which we must make choice of what

helps most to quiet and devotion of heart, considering the weakness of him who prays, and the edification of others, if the place be public; for in this case, such a position of body is to be used as shall not draw attention from the passers-by.

CHAPTER VIII

ON CONTEMPLATION, AND HOW SOME MAY USE MENTAL PRAYER WITHOUT VARIETY OF DISCOURSE

So far we have spoken of the ordinary forms of mental prayer, which are accommodated to all sorts of persons who desire to treat with Almighty God, though all do not exercise it in the same way. For some in their prayer use more discourse and less affection; others content themselves with little discourse,[1] and busy themselves most with affections. Others again have no need of more than a single sight of the truth, and with that they are moved to all the acts of devotion of which we have spoken; these enjoy what we call contemplation, which (as St Thomas observes) is a single view of eternal truth, without variety of reasoning, penetrating it with the light of heaven, with great affections of admiration and love (2, 2, q. clxxx, art. 3), to which ordinarily no man arrives but by much exercise of meditation and discourse.

1. Beginners, therefore, in virtue and the exercise of prayer need to spend much time ordinarily in meditations and reasonings,

[1] Or Reasoning.

inquiring who and what God is, who Christ our Saviour is, what are his perfections, virtues, and marvellous works; moving themselves with these considerations to love him and to take him for their Master, their Lord, and the friend and spouse of their souls. But after they are much exercised and practised in this, it often happens that a single view or remembrance of God, without new discourses, is enough to inflame them in his love and in the other affections aforesaid. There are even some that with only hearing the name of Jesus or Father, or the name of mortal sin, hell, or heaven, penetrate in a moment what is comprehended in them with great affections of love or sorrow.

2. Such persons as doubt their capacity for the intellectual part of meditation ought to be admonished that the end of all the meditations and discourses spoken of in the three parts of this book is to attain to three notions or sorts of knowledge: One of *himself*, and of his innumerable necessities and miseries of body and soul; the other of Christ Jesus our Lord, true God and true man, and of his excellent virtues, especially those which were resplendent in his nativity, Passion and death; and the third of Almighty God Three and One, and of his infinite perfections and excellences, and of the benefits which proceed from him. (Jo. x.) These three sorts of knowledge go linked with one another, entering and

issuing from one to another; ascending from man himself, and from Christ to God, and descending from God to Christ and to himself. And from them (says St Thomas) springs that devotion which comprehends three sorts of affections corresponding to them in the will.

3. Some affections concern himself; confounding himself for his sins and want of zeal, being exceedingly sorry for them, purposing amendment and humbling himself that instead of fruit he has brought forth nothing but sin. Others concern Christ our Lord; compassionating his afflictions, rejoicing in his virtues, desiring to imitate him in them, and asking his grace to that end. Others concern God our Lord, admiring his greatness, praising him for it, giving him thanks for the benefits he has done us, offering ourselves very sincerely to serve him in return for them, mingling with this petitions for heavenly graces and gifts for himself and for the whole Church, particularising those things of which he has the greatest need.

4. This presupposed, any person whatsoever, desirous to use mental prayer, however weak he may be, may put himself in the presence of the living God, whom he has near him and within him; and renewing the knowledge which he has by faith of these three things, may quietly exercise the affections belonging to them; sometimes confessing to God all his miseries one by one,

with affections of grief and humiliation, and desiring remedy for them—sometimes calling to memory some mystery of Christ our Lord, his humility, obedience, patience, with affections and desires of imitating them—at other times recounting the benefits he has received from God, with affections of thanksgiving; or remembering the infinite perfections of God, his bounty, mercy and providence, with affections of prayer and joy. And these affections, by God's favour, will be elicited without any difficulty; for the mysteries and truths of our faith are like flint-stones, which, in touching them with the steel of any single consideration cast out sparks of love, which if the soul, like tinder, be well disposed to receive, presently send up great flames of feeling and affection.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE EXTRAORDINARY FORMS OF MENTAL PRAYER AND THE DIVERS MANNERS BY WHICH GOD COMMUNICATES HIMSELF IN IT

1. By those things that have been said concerning prayer, it manifestly appears, as says St Augustine, that it is the gift of the Holy Spirit, promised by God our Lord to his Church when he said: "I will pour down upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of grace and of prayer" (Zach. xii 10), without which spirit none pray rightly. (Epis. 105, *prope fin.*) For, as St Paul says, "We are not sufficient to think anything" holy "of ourselves, as of ourselves" (2 Cor. iii 5), nor do we know "what we should pray for as we ought" (Rom. viii 26), if the Spirit of God does not teach and move us to it. For this he has divers ways, guiding some one way and some another, so that it would be an intolerable error to imagine that all are to go by the same way that I am guided; for the Spirit of God is "*unicus et multiplex*," "one" only and "manifold" (Sap. vii 22); one only in the substance and principal end which it aims at, and manifold in the means and ways it takes to attain it.

2. These ways in general are two: one *ordinary*, which comprehends all the forms of prayer that we have hitherto treated of; the other *extraordinary*, which includes other forms of prayer more supernatural and special, which we call prayer of *quiet* or silence, with suspension, ecstasy or rapture, with imaginary figures of truths which are discovered, or with only an intellectual understanding of them (St Thom. 2, 2, q. clxxiv, art. 1, ad 3; *ibid.*, St Isidore; et art. 3, et q. clv; art. 1 et 2, ad 1 et 2), together with revelations and interior speeches, and with other innumerable means that Almighty God has to communicate himself to souls, of which no certain rule can be given, because they have no other rule but the teaching and direction of the sovereign Master, who teaches it to whom he will and how he will. For such sorts of prayer are not to be desired or attempted by ourselves upon pain of being proud and presumptuous and in that case unworthy of them . . . nay rather on our part we are to refuse them with humility, because of the danger we may incur of being deluded by Satan, transfigured into an angel of light. But when God shall communicate them, they are to be received with humility and thanksgiving, and with great wariness and prudence.

3. But that we may have some light of these extraordinary and marvellous means that God has to cheer souls and to communicate himself to them in mental prayer,

I will point out some of them; in which are touched also certain things which pass ordinarily in all, and it is good to know them, for they help us in our ordinary prayer.

4. For explanation of this, I premise that as the body has its five exterior senses with which it perceives the *visible* and *delectable* things of *this* life, and has experience of them, so the spirit, with its faculties of understanding and will, has five interior acts proportionable to these senses, which we call seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching spiritually, with which it perceives the *invisible* and delectable things of Almighty God, and takes experience of them; from which springs the experimental knowledge of God (Cassian, collat. xii, cap. 13), which incomparably exceeds all the knowledge that proceeds from our reasonings, as the sweetness of honey is much better known by tasting it than by using much reasoning to know it. And so by these experiences mystical theology is gained, which is the delectable wisdom and knowledge of God. "In many of these things," says St Bernard, "the understanding attains no more than that which experience perceives" (Serm. xxii in Cant.).

(i) First, God our Lord communicates himself sometimes by a spiritual *presence* with his illuminations, communicating to the understanding a manner of light so elevated that by it, like another Moses, it *beholds* the invisible as if it were visible.

(Heb. xi 27.) And although it retains the virtue of faith, yet it retains it so illustrated and perfected concerning the mysteries thereof that it appears another light. This *sight* is wont to be accompanied by a kind of spiritual alacrity which is called joy, leaping as it were with pleasure and joy for the strangeness of the divine greatness that it has seen.

To this manner of contemplation or interior beholding our Lord himself invites us, saying: "Be still and see that I am God" (Ps. xlv 11); which is to say, Cease from sins and disengage yourselves from earthly business, and attend carefully to the consideration of my works, and you shall come to see with great light that I only am God, glorious among the nations, and exalted over the whole earth. Somewhat of this our Lord very ordinarily communicates to his servants by certain sudden illustrations, which, like lightnings, reveal to them some truth of our holy faith after a manner very different from what they perceived before (Ps. lxxvi 3, and xcvi 4, 11), which although they pass suddenly, yet leave the heart very much inflamed with affections of the love of God or sorrow for sins, according to the truth upon which they have received this light.

(ii) The second manner of our Lord's communicating himself to us is by a spiritual *hearing*, speaking within our souls by his inspirations certain interior lively and effectual words, sometimes even as distinct as

those heard by our bodily ears; with which he teaches some truth or discovers his will with such efficacy as to work its fulfilment. And sometimes, as the Spouse says in the Canticles, the soul becomes tender and melts in the love of God (Cant. v 6). So he whose heart was sad, dismayed, frozen and hardened to the things of the spirit, with one of these interior words in a moment becomes joyful, confident, enkindled and softened for whatsoever God will do with it.

(iii) The third manner of God's communicating himself to us interiorly is by a spiritual *smelling*, infusing into the soul an odour and fragrance of spiritual things so sweet that it comforts the heart and revives it to aim at and seek them. The glorious Evangelist St John, being well experienced in this inward conversation with Almighty God, was wont to say: "*Odor tuus, Domine, excitavit in nobis concupiscientias æternas*" (St Bonav. sup. dist. 6): "Thy odour, Lord, has raised in us eternal desires and affections." Odour he calls a very spiritual sensitiveness to eternal things which we see and hear not and yet believe and hope to attain, from which proceed fervent acts of hope, desires, and great courage to use all possible means to attain them, which St Paul calls "rejoicing in hope" (Rom. xii 12). Souls that receive in prayer this odour and scent of the divinity of God our Lord and of his most sacred humanity, of his charity and bounty and of his other virtues, run with great fervour and

diligence in the pursuit of those eternal things which they have scented, not resting till they possess them in such manner as they may in this life, with the hope to possess them entirely in the next. This is especially seen in such as God calls to a religious life and gives them any sense and odour of the sweetness, security and sanctity which they shall find in it, for which they tread under foot a thousand difficulties, and rest not till they obtain what they desire.

(iv) The fourth manner of God our Lord's communicating himself is by a spiritual *taste,* communicating to the soul such fervour and sweetness in spiritual things that those of the flesh seem tasteless to him. For which reason David said: "*Taste* and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps. xxxiii 9); that is, if you taste what God is and the works he does within you, by this taste you shall know how sweet he is, how good, how wise, how potent, how liberal and how merciful. For if manna, being but *one* meat, had the savour of all meats to cherish the just with its corporal sweetness (Sap. xvi 20), how much more eminently has God the sweetness of all things for the consolation of those that converse with him in prayer? To some he gives it in meditating his perfections;—to some meditating his benefits;—to others, meditating his holy law, which David said was "sweeter to him than honey and the honeycomb" (Ps. xviii 11). But this sweetness is hidden for those that fear

God and reverence him, for they only taste it with most abundance, but having once tasted it, they have (says Cassian) no tongue to declare it, for it far surpasses all that our senses can attain to (Collat. xii, c. 12).

True it is that God gives some part of this to beginners, and even to sinners, to wean them from the milk of their earthly consolations; but much more abundantly he gives it to those who for his love have mortified themselves by depriving themselves of them.

(v) The fifth manner of God's communicating himself is by a spiritual *touching;* touching with his loving inspirations the recesses of the heart, and our Lord joining himself to the soul with such gentleness and affection as cannot be expressed. For God interiorly embraces it with the arms of charity and cherishes it, giving it interior testimonies of his presence, of the love he bears it, and of the care he has of it, with very great tokens of peace and very familiar friendship. And whosoever perceives himself so favoured, embraces within him God himself with the arms of love, saying, "I hold him, and I will not let him go" (Cant. iii 4). But these singular graces are not to be ambitioned, but received with humility when he shall be pleased to grant them as we have before said.

5. These are the *extraordinary* manners of our Lord's communicating himself by the interior senses of the soul. It belongs to us only, by God's grace, so to mortify the five

corporal senses that God may open to us the spiritual; for as St Gregory says, if the exterior sense be shut, forthwith the interior sense is open. And contrariwise, as St Augustine says, the interior sense sleeps if the exterior be given over to its pleasures.

CHAPTER X

ON THE TIME TO BE EMPLOYED IN MENTAL PRAYER AND OF EJACULATORY PRAYER

1. THE time that is to be spent in mental prayer is of two sorts: the one *ordinary*, for every day, so long as life lasts and health permits; the other, *extraordinary*, recollecting ourselves at certain times for the space of a week or two, or more, spending our whole time in meditation and spiritual exercises, which may be done for several ends and divers occasions.

(i) First, when one is heavy laden with sins and desires to make a true confession of one's life and a perfect conversion, it is an admirable means to withdraw oneself for eight days or more to some retired place, spending all the time in thinking on one's sins and in meditations that may move to sorrow for them and to make a very perfect renovation and change of life.

(ii) Secondly, when any one desires to learn this mystical science of the spirit to know how to pray mentally, how to converse with Almighty God, and to gain herein some use and experience, it is good to dedicate a month or two to this exercise until one is

well versed in it. And although the principal master of this science is God himself, yet it is also useful to have a visible tutor to help and direct one, and to take time to learn and practise what one is taught.

(iii) The third occasion is when one desires to choose some state of life, and doubts which were the fittest to choose for one's salvation and perfection;—or when one desires to begin any great enterprise in the service of God, or stands in doubt of our Lord's good pleasure and will therein;—or being assured of it, one desires to make a good beginning and to prepare oneself with prayer, imploring God's favour and our good success therein; in such cases it is very profitable to take some time of retirement, as did Christ our Lord, retiring into the desert for forty days before he began to preach. (Matt. iv 2.)

(iv) Fourthly, when those that use this mental prayer find themselves distracted, cold and dry in it, and besides, find themselves very slack in matters of divine service. In these cases, the most effectual means of renewing their fervour is to dedicate eight days to prayer, spending therein the greater part of the day; and as almost all fall to some extent into this slackness by little and little, it is good once every year to recollect oneself for eight days to this end.

(v) Finally, although a man find in himself no slackness, yet it is good now and then to give himself an abundance and fullness

of God, so as to increase in his love and to excel the more in his service, as many saints were accustomed to do, and by this means attained to very high sanctity.

2. As for the *ordinary* time, no general rule can be given for all; for this time must be measured by the ability, health, state and office, and by the necessary obligations and occupations of every man. But these things being considered, the more time that can be spent in this exercise without hindrance to other duties, the better. Ordinarily, it were well for a man to take an hour in the morning or at night, seeing that our Saviour Christ spent an hour in that retired prayer which he made in the garden of Gethsemane, as we may gather from the rebuke he gave to St Peter, saying: "Could you not watch with me one hour?" (Matt. xxvi 40.) But if his business will not allow him to give an hour, then let it be half an hour; if he cannot be half an hour, then let him, if he please, employ but a quarter of an hour, and spend it in examination of conscience; and let him allow himself some longer time for prayer upon holy days, because they were instituted for this very purpose.

3. Considering this ordinary time, we must be very careful that after we have decided what time we intend to spend daily in prayer, whether by rule of our state (as for religious) or by direction of our confessor, we must be very constant in spending the *whole* time entirely in that exercise, without,

if possible, letting slip one day, or even losing one *credo* of the time allotted; because the Devil, with great solicitude, invents a thousand devices, to make us interrupt our prayer; for after omitting it one day without good cause, a man comes to omit it afterwards another and another day, and at length to omit it altogether. And if at any time out of real want of health or for any other lawful or urgent cause, we are forced to interrupt our prayer, when the hindrance is past, we must at once return to our exercise; so that the interruption which began through pure necessity be not continued by sloth and tepidity.

4. Lastly, that no man may exempt himself from this so high and sovereign exercise, I add that all in general, as well those who have a set time for prayer (if they will preserve their devotion) as those that have not this time, to supply this defect ought to exercise themselves often every day in the brief acts of mental or vocal prayer which we call ejaculations, of which we have already made mention; in which the Fathers of the Desert exercised themselves very often every day, briefly putting themselves in mind of Almighty God and of his benefits, or of their own sins, and shooting forthwith like a dart some fervent affection up to heaven, or a brief petition for some virtue, in some such manner as the following: "O Lord, that I had never offended thee! O my God, that I may love thee!

That I may obey thee! Give me, Lord, purity of soul, humility of heart, and poverty of spirit! Pardon my sins, O my Redeemer, for they are exceedingly grievous!"

5. This manner of prayer, being short, is easy to all, and may be made with great attention and zeal, as Cassian tells us. It is therefore very effectual to obtain from our Lord what we require; for it is much more profitable to pray a little well and with attention, than to pray much after another manner; for God is not overcome by the multiplicity of our prayers, but by the weight and fervour of them.

6. The brevity of these prayers is to be made up for by their frequency, by this means fulfilling in some sort what our Saviour said, "We ought always to pray and not to faint." (Luke xviii 1.) That is, not to fail either in the time assigned to prayer, nor in fervour therein, nor in confidence; multiplying these ejaculatory prayers which, as David says, are "the remainders of 'those holy thoughts' we had in the morning, making to ourselves a feast, and preserving our devotion all the day." (Ps. lxxv 1.)

7. St Chrysostom says that at the least we ought to offer to God every hour one of these prayers: "*Ut orandi cursus cursum diei aequet*" (Lib. i. de orandi Deo ad finem); so that when the clock strikes the hour, it may serve as an alarum to prayer. But those that are very fervent employ much

more frequency, imitating the holy monks of Egypt, of whom Cassian says, "*Preces et orationes per singula momenta miscentes*"; mingling with their handiwork prayers and affections every moment of the day: and by this short method, they arrived in a little time to much sanctity and attained to great merits. Nor is it to be wondered at that we should be very eager for this holy exercise, for at all times and at all hours we may gain by prayer that which is of more value than the whole world. And this is manifestly true; for if a man should waste a whole day in framing interior acts of blasphemies, vengeance, hatred of God, or other detestable sins, at the end of the day he would have merited most terrible torments; so, on the other hand, if he spend it in the interior acts of this mental prayer, multiplying good determinations and desires of pleasing Almighty God, with petitions for virtue, at the end of the day he will find himself enriched by an incredible gain of celestial gifts and of an everlasting reward; for God is no less liberal in rewarding than he is just in chastising.

PART II

FOR PROFICIENTS IN THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY

A. Of the three lives, Active, Contemplative and Mixed

CHAPTER I

ON THE PERFECT IMITATION OF OUR SAVIOUR CHRIST WHICH IS THE END OF THESE MEDITATIONS

1. The meditations belonging to the illuminative way, of which we shall treat in this second part, have for their subject the mysteries of the life of our Saviour Christ, from the time of his Incarnation until his Death upon the Cross. These, as we have already said (Book I, chap. iv), are divided into three parts: (i) Those of his Incarnation and childhood; (ii) those of his preaching; and (iii) those of his Passion and Death. After which follows the glorified life, which belongs to the unitive way; to this also are highly conducive the mysteries of the Passion, in which our Saviour Christ disclosed the excess of his wonderful love. All these mysteries the divine wisdom ordained that they might be, with a pleasing variety, the spiritual sustenance of souls that travel to perfection. Into which souls this sovereign king enters, as into the "cellar of his precious wine" (Cant. ii 4), and from these mysteries, as from celestial vessels, he draws the fervent

wine of love and of other ardent affections, with which he cheers, sustains, and inebriates, setting in order charity within them, with that order with which our Lord himself exercised his acts; to which he invites and exhorts us, saying: "I am come into my garden, my sister, my spouse, I have gathered my wine with my aromatical spices; I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine, my milk. Eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved." (Cant. v 1.) Which is to say: "By my Incarnation I am come into the garden of my Church, and in entering into the world I cut the myrrh of much bitterness and mortification that I suffered in my infancy, with the 'aromatical spices' of most odoriferous virtues. I preached my doctrine and practised it with as much pleasure as he that 'eats the honeycomb with the honey.' I became so inebriated with the wine of my love that I was as much pleased with drinking the chalice of my Passion as he that drinks 'wine with its milk.' Therefore, my friends, prepare the garden of your souls; for in them I desire to work other three like effects, you yourselves also working in them through my grace, to imitate my life. First of all, cut 'myrrh' and the 'aromatical spices' of virtues, that may mortify your passions and preserve you from the corruption of your sins, imitating hereby my purity. Then eat my 'honeycomb with its honey,' meditating

upon the excellent doctrine that I preached, figured by the wax of the honeycomb that gives light. But you are not to eat it alone, but with the imitation of the heroic virtues included therein, figured by the honey, that nourishes with its sweetness. And finally, 'drink' and be inebriated with the wine of my perfect love, mingled with the 'milk' that I will give you of my divine consolation; with which you will so easily renounce affection to all earthly things that you shall, if need be, remain stretched upon another cross, loving me as I have loved you."

2. These are the three principal exercises of well-ordered charity in her three states, of beginning, increase and perfection. They are also the principal ends to which the meditation of the childhood, preaching and passion of our Saviour Christ are designed. Among them those of his childhood have this special excellence, that they move us to love him with more tenderness and to imitate him with more sweetness; because as in making himself a child for us, he ate the food proper to children, that is, "butter and honey"; so also, to those that meditate the mysteries of his infancy, especially to beginners, he is wont to give more abundantly the milk and honey of divine consolation to wean them from all that is earthly, and to animate them to the imitation of his heroic virtues.

3. To attain these ends we should endeavour, by means of prayer and meditation,

to know Christ Jesus our Lord, true God and true man, with so certain, proper, entire and perfect a knowledge that it may come to understand and penetrate the infinite dignity of his person, and the inestimable riches and treasures of his grace, with great esteem and appreciation of it. For in this knowledge, as is testified by our Lord himself, consists "eternal life." (John xvii 3.) And from it, as from seed, proceed the means to obtain it; with its breath is enkindled in "meditation" the fire of charity, which enflames us with his love, from which springs fortitude of heart to imitate his life with so great perfection that, according to St Gregory Nyssen, a Christian may be called "*alter Christus*," another Christ, in patience, humility and all the other virtues.

4. The *manner* of meditating upon these mysteries, to effect what we aim at, must be to keep our eyes fixed upon four things, and to ponder them with attention.

(i) To behold the persons that are introduced in the mystery, with the perfections and interior excellences which are in them.

(ii) The *words* they speak, and their purpose, together with the manner in which they speak.

(iii) To behold their *works* and the virtues resplendent in those works.

(iv) To consider the *things they suffer* with all their circumstances, considering the ends of it and the motives to it. Out of all these

four things, I am always to draw some profit for myself, animating myself to imitate what may be imitated, with those other affections and colloquies which we spoke of in the beginning of this book. (Part I, chaps. i and ii.)

CHAPTER II

ON THE TWO LIVES, ACTIVE AND CONTEMPLATIVE

1. It is the common opinion of the holy Fathers and spiritual writers, that the spiritual life includes *two sorts* of works and exercises, which they call the *active* and *contemplative* life.

(i) The *active* is a manner of life dedicated principally to *exterior works* for our own spiritual advancement, or for the profit of our neighbours, exercising towards them the works of charity and mercy, either the corporal, with which beginners are to commence, or the spiritual, those of teaching and preaching, which are more proper to the perfect.

(ii) The *contemplative* is a manner of life dedicated principally to the interior works of the *knowledge* and *love* of Almighty God, ascending by the degrees and exercises of reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation, of which we have already treated.

2. These two ways are wont to go together, and wonderfully to aid one another with the intermingling of their actions, whence results that life which we call *mixed*, composed of both, and comprising all that is more perfect,

in both one and the other. (St Th. 3 p., q. lx, art. 51, ad 2 and 3.)

Hence it is that Christ our Lord, who came into the world to be a master and universal pattern of all perfection in all sorts of lives and for all sorts of persons, when he had, in the first thirty years of his life, exercised humility, obedience and silence, with other exterior works of the active life, for our example, he would, during the last three, leave us an heroic model of the *mixed* life, joining the activities of the *active* life to the works proper to the *contemplative* in a most perfect manner, more divine than human, as we shall see hereafter.

3. In order that this may be well understood, it is necessary first to declare the *functions* of these two lives, their *actions* and *properties*, as our Lord exercised them, taking for example the history which St Luke recounts of the two sisters: Martha, who received our Lord into her house, and Mary who sat at his feet to hear his doctrine.

CHAPTER III

ON THE PRINCIPAL ACTIONS OF THE ACTIVE LIFE

THE principal actions and functions of the active life are mystically declared by St Luke saying: Jesus "entered into a certain town; and a certain woman named Martha received him into her house." (Luke x 38.) Here he touches upon three functions belonging to this manner of life.

1. The first is to *prepare the house of our soul,* to lodge therein spiritually Christ Jesus our Lord: which we do by the following exercises: (i) By cleansing it from all sin by the *works of penance;* because Incarnate Wisdom will not "enter into a soul defiled, nor dwell in a body subject to sin." (Sap. 4.) (ii) By quieting and appeasing the storms and tumults of disordered passions, with the practice of *mortification:* because no guest delights to lodge for long in a house which is full of noise and disturbance. (iii) By *adorning* it with *moral virtues,* in practising the works of piety with great fervour and perfection: because our Lord Jesus Christ delights to dwell in a house decked with this precious tapestry, and is well pleased and contented to remain in it, uniting himself

with his host by the union of grace and charity.

2. The second function of the active life is to *harbour* with us in our house Christ our Lord in his poor members, as Martha harboured him with his poor apostles, exercising towards them the seven corporal works of mercy. To such as do this our Lord said: "As long as you did it to one of my least brethren, you did it to me." (Luke x 38.) I therefore hold myself indebted to you for all that you have done to my poor and needy members, for I and they are but one, and I am in them.

3. The third function which appertains to the active life, and is much more perfect when it is joined with the contemplative, is to *procure a lodging for Christ our Lord in the souls of our neighbours,* inciting them to receive him, and disposing and rendering them fit for this reception; for Christ our Lord much delights to be lodged in them. This is done by exercising the spiritual works of mercy;—such are, to instruct, counsel, correct, preach, confess, administer sacraments and the like; herein greatly shine the works of charity, love of our neighbour, and our burning zeal for their salvation. This was the office of the disciples whom Christ our Lord sent before him into all the cities and places into which he himself intended to enter; that they might prepare him a lodging in the souls of men.

CHAPTER IV

ON THE ACTIONS AND WORKS OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

THE principal actions of the contemplative life are declared by St Luke the Evangelist, when he says: Martha "had a sister called Mary, who, sitting also at the Lord's feet, heard his word." (Luke x 38.) In this he teaches us in what the principal office and occupation of the contemplative life consists, namely, to enjoy that divine guest whom her sister the active life had lodged in her soul, and prostrate in spirit at his feet, to *hearken to his heavenly doctrine;* for as they are both sisters and daughters of the same Father, Almighty God, engendered for the selfsame end of our perfection and his glory, hence it is that the Holy Ghost begets first the active life, which is the elder sister, and lesser in perfection, and by her help adorns the house in which he himself will lodge and the bed on which he proposes to repose. Then he produces the contemplative life; because he desires that his host should hear his doctrine and receive the sweet embrace of his divine love. (Cant. i.) The properties of this contemplative life are as follows:

1. To *approach and draw nigh to our*

divine Lord, Jesus Christ, because Martha, being busied in the work of the house, was the more remote from Jesus Christ: but Mary sat motionless at his feet. Even so, those who give themselves to contemplation, approach much more nearly in spirit to God, and remain more assiduously in his presence by knowledge and love, to receive from him the light and splendour of divine virtues, as David says: "Come ye to him and be enlightened." (Ps. xxxiii 6.)

2. Secondly, to *sit in quiet near to Christ*; for, ceasing then from those exterior works which are wont to disquiet us, we manage to recollect all our powers and to quiet all our imaginations, thoughts and affections, endeavouring only to know and love Almighty God and to hear what he speaks within our hearts, as David again says: "Be still and see that I am God" (Ps. xlv 11), and "I will hear what the Lord God will speak in me." (Ps. lxxxiv, 9.)

3. To *sit at the feet* of our Lord Jesus Christ, protesting by this action various holy and devout affections. (i) Of *humility*, choosing the lowest place in the presence of this our Lord. (ii) Of *reverence*, acknowledging the greatness of the majesty of this master. (iii) Of *subjection*, offering to obey him in all that he shall command us. (iv) Of *imitation*, truly resolving to follow his footsteps: and all this with love, humility, reverence, subjection and imitation, desiring from the bottom of our hearts to embrace the feet of Jesus Christ.

4. Lastly, the particular work of the contemplative life is attentively to *hearken to the word of God :* which may be practised in several ways. (i) To hear the word of God by *spiritual reading*, by means of which God speaks to us, teaching us the doctrine which we read. (ii) To hear the word of God by the mouth of *preachers, teachers and masters*, by whom Christ our Lord speaks to us. (iii) To hear it from *God himself* in *devout meditation*, communing with him interiorly in our own hearts by divers affections, searching out divine truths and receiving from our divine Master the understanding of them. (iv) Lastly, to hear the same in *contemplation* which is a simple and affectionate view of those truths which we consider as being in God. For even as he that hearkens and considers attentively, using nothing of his own discourse, receives purely and truly the doctrine which his Master teaches ; so the soul in contemplation, with little labour and with much delight, receives interiorly profound inspirations, illustrations, and wonderful feelings towards Almighty God ; by means of which he instructs, illustrates, feeds and inflames her with the affections of love, even to receiving within her, by the selfsame word, the Word Incarnate, which is God himself, with whom she unites herself in the perfect union of grace and charity. (Jac. i 17.)

CHAPTER V

ON THE NECESSITY WHICH THE ACTIVE LIFE HAS OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE AND OF THE COMPLAINTS MADE AGAINST THE CONTEMPLATIVE

MARTHA, overburdened with cares and anxieties about household affairs, went to Christ, and said: "Lord, hast thou no care that my sister hath left me alone to serve? speak to her therefore that she help me." (Luke x 40.)

1. In this complaint is plainly shown the *necessity* which the *active life has of the contemplative.* First, after the example of Martha, she freely confesses that she is not sufficient of herself to serve Jesus Christ as he desires, although she performs all the functions proper to her state, unless she be assisted by her sister contemplation. To her it appertains to procure devotion and sweetness in the practice of many exterior works, without which the active life remains dry, disgusted, replete with complaints and many repugnances. For which reason St Bernard says "that consideration ought to precede and go before every action; for although without perfect contemplation a man may enter into heaven, yet without some degree

of it we cannot walk with enjoyment nor bear with sweetness the burden and yoke of the law of God." (Lib. de Consid. ad Eugenium.)

2. Hence it is that her own very necessity constrains the active life to repose with Martha, who "*stood*" and addressed herself to Jesus Christ by prayers and petitions, craving of him the spirit of contemplation, in such degree as was most fitting and meet to help her. So she says with affectionate complaint: "Lord, thou art forgetful of me, and leavest me here destitute and alone, without the company of my sister contemplation; speak to her therefore that she help me. And since thy saying is doing and thy will is working, "send out of thy holy heaven and from the throne of thy majesty" the spirit of wisdom, together with the gifts that proceed from that same spirit, that he "may be with me, and may labour with me, that I may know what is acceptable with thee." (Sap. ix 10.)

3. But here we must beware of *certain complaints* which imperfect persons are wont to make, who wholly exercise themselves in the active life, for which notwithstanding they are well rewarded.

(i) Some, by a secret pride, complain and bewail to Christ our Lord that, labouring much in exterior works in his holy service, he *leaves them alone*, without the tenderness and enjoyment of contemplation, as if he had no care of them, nor rewarded their labours

with the same reward as others, as the elder brother of the prodigal son complained to his father that he did not treat him as well as he did the younger. (Luke xv 29, 30.) This is an egregious mistake, for this sovereign Father of all forgets not any, but is fully as careful of even the least labourer as of the highest contemplative, favouring each according to their function. Therefore to tax Almighty God with carelessness on this point is a proof that he knows neither God nor himself, for want of humility; for whoever knows him and knows himself holds himself exceedingly happy only to be allowed to serve him, asking no other recompense or reward than God himself: Until he thus humble himself he cannot attain to contemplation which, as the Scripture says, "is denied to the proud and lofty, and is bestowed on the humble and lowly."

(ii) Others complain silently of the contemplative, as Martha of Mary, *reputing them as idle and of little profit to the Church*, advising their neighbours to counsel them to relinquish contemplation and to come to assist them in their exterior works. In their disgust they ask of Christ our Lord to speak to them and command them to get up on their feet and come to help them;—a complaint palpably erroneous, and coming from very inexperienced persons, who will needs direct all by the same way in which they themselves walk. For contemplatives are not idle, but very well employed in the work

of the Lord, as in a thing in which he takes a singular delight, and they greatly assist the Church and all her workmen, entreating for them grace and favour from God our Lord, both to labour and to reap the fruits of their holy labours. So that even God himself becomes the patron of the contemplatives, as we are soon to see.

4. It is therefore of great importance to me, that I *resign myself* into the hands of my heavenly Father, who gives his gifts and graces to whom he pleases, and how he pleases, imparting to every one that which is most meet and proper for him. (1 Cor. xii.) With this assurance I will accept and follow that kind of life which he has allotted me, rendering him humble thanks also for what he has given to others, and rejoice to see them so exalted, since their greatness helps my littleness, and by means of charity I will appropriate to myself the gifts of others.

CHAPTER VI

ON OTHER IMPERFECTIONS OF THE ACTIVE LIFE AND ON OUR LORD'S METHOD OF CORRECTING THEM

OUR Lord replied, "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and art troubled about many things." (Luke x 41.) In this answer Christ our Lord, repeating twice the name of Martha, *shewed* the love he bore her, but blamed her for her too great care and anxiety about things, even though they were good. Thereby he declared to us the abuses which commonly hinder the imperfect in the active life, although he does not on that account cease to love them.

The roots of this anxious and troublesome solicitude are commonly *three :*

1. The natural temperament and character of the person ; because some are by nature unsteady and wholly inapt for contemplation ; so that the more they retire themselves, the more is their imagination troubled. Others, on the contrary, who are by nature peaceable and addicted to retirement, are in a manner wholly unfit for exterior works. For this reason as the love of God is wont to cause the one to issue forth from their retirement, even so the fear of God causes the

others to taste of contemplation which, as an anchor, retains firm and stable the ship of their soul, amid the waves and tempests that toss her, for that is possible to grace which is impossible to nature. So that such as feel themselves drawn to prayer and contemplation ought not to be dismayed, but fix and fasten their heart on Almighty God, with these two anchors of fear and confidence, dreading the loss they may sustain if they do not apply themselves to prayer, hoping with the help and assistance of God to attain to it.

2. The second root is *inexperience, dismayed zeal*, or *lack of knowledge and discretion* in this important affair. Hence it proceeds that, through a false idea of piety, a man seeks to embrace many things and to charge himself with a multitude of affairs above his strength; to this are added trouble and interior anxiety as to how he is to accomplish it all. With this our Lord taxed Martha who, under pretext of serving him and preparing his supper busied herself with too much care and solicitude. The remedy for this is to correct the errors of the judgement and only to undertake moderate occupations, so that the spirit be not choked and stifled, and that we do not lose the time and quiet necessary for contemplation.

3. The third root is a certain sort of *propriety*, which proceeds from self-love, which intrudes and intermingles itself among good things; though it may be in but little things, yet if we pursue them passionately

they bring us trouble. This particularly happens to three sorts of persons: (i) Those who are very *sensitive* and of an over-eager temperament, though their intention may be very good. (ii) The *vainglorious* who, possessed by this vice, strive and struggle, and will perforce bring all things to pass. (iii) The *indiscreet* and *ignorant* who suppose to be expedient all that appears to be lawful, and by an abuse of their affections render themselves subject to their own passions.

From any of these roots it may proceed that the active life may come to hinder the contemplative. But by duly mortifying them, they may both live united together as loving sisters, neither hindering the other, but mutually assisting each other.

CHAPTER VII

ON THE "ONE THING NECESSARY"

CONTINUING, our Lord Jesus Christ said to Martha: "But one thing is necessary." In these words he laid the foundation both of the defence and praise of Mary, and therefore of the contemplative life, the end of which is to *reduce all things to unity*, rejecting multiplicity and diversity as much as may be. To this it aspires by the following degrees:

1. The first unity is in the use of temporal things, reducing them to that one necessary, which is that which suffices to sustain life. Hence Christ our Lord admonished Martha, saying, "I would not have thee so solicitous in providing a multiplicity of things for me and my disciples, because one thing alone will suffice us to sustain nature, and with that we will content ourselves."

This unity, so restrained in the use of temporal things, greatly disposes to quietness of heart and contemplation, because with it one cuts off all desires and anxious cares.

2. The second unity is in the end and intention of all our works, reducing them all to one only and necessary end, which is the glory of God and the accomplishment of his

will and our own salvation; mortifying and cutting off the multitude or variety of intentions or aims contrary to this one thing, or which do not directly lead or conduce towards it.

3. The third unity proper to the contemplative life is in the right use of the senses and interior powers of the soul, reducing them all to union, wholly attending to the knowledge and actual love of Almighty God. For this reason the soul should endeavour to become united and recollected within itself; being *one* in her *sensual affections*, reducing them to union with the spirit and mortifying the rebellions of the flesh; *one* in her *will*, referring her whole will entirely to the will of Almighty God, and renouncing all contentment in creatures; *one* in her *cares*, uniting them all in the one care of being pleasing to her Creator and leaving all the rest to his divine providence; *one* in her *thoughts*, gathering them all together so as to think of nothing but God, and how to serve him, resisting distractions as much as possible; *one* finally in *love*, placing it wholly in one infinite good who shall satisfy and satiate it, saying with David: "What have I in heaven, and besides thee what do I desire upon earth?" (Ps. lxxii 25.)

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE EXCELLENCES OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE

OUR Lord concludes by saying: "Mary has chosen the best part which shall not be taken away from her."

1. In these words it is first to be remarked that although our Saviour said that Mary had chosen the better part, that is, *contemplation*, because she freely applied herself to that sort of life, yet the spring and root of this choice was the grace and inspiration of Almighty God, which moved her will to make this election; for in this manner of living is verified our Lord's words to his Apostles:—"You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." (John xv 16.) For it belongs to the Holy Ghost, who imparts other graces, to impart this also, inspiring it in whom he pleases.

2. But that none may excuse themselves from applying themselves as much as they can to obtaining this grace, Jesus Christ said that Mary had chosen this best part of the contemplative life, which he judges to be better than the part of Martha, which is the active life, because *it is more united with the sovereign good*, whence "every best and every

perfect gift" proceeds. For it makes a man more like God and the holy angels;—it perfects the two most noble powers of the soul, that is, the understanding and the will;—enlightening the understanding with the most excellent act of wisdom, which is the knowledge of God, and inflaming the will with the most heroic act of charity, which is the love of the same God;—and as from this the love of our neighbour proceeds, even so from contemplation proceeds the perfection of exterior works, producing fervour of spirit, sweetness and integrity.

3. To these excellences Christ our Lord has added another saying, that it *should "not be taken away from her."* As if he had said: "Not for all thy reasons, Martha, nor for all thy complaints will I take from Mary that part which she has chosen, to make her take thine, although it be good, for hers is better": this our Lord accomplishes in three ways:

(i) First, whomsoever he has called by a special vocation to this sort of life, *he on his part never takes it from them*, nor desires that others should take it from them, nor that they should suffer themselves to be withdrawn by any persuasions, or apparent human reasons, but wills that they should persevere in their vocation till death.

(ii) Secondly, those whom he has once drawn by his inspiration and motion to this sovereign exercise, *he never withdraws from it*, nor desires that others withdraw them, on

any pretext whatever. On the contrary, he defends them as he did Mary, saying: "I adjure you, daughters of Sion, that you make not the beloved awake till she please." (Cant. ii 7.) That is to say, "that you disquiet not the sweet sleep of her contemplation, nor disturb her intercourse with me until she has satisfied her longing and necessity, because, her will being one with mine, she will leave her sleep when I desire her to do so; so also, when either charity to her neighbour or obedience to her superior require otherwise, promptly and readily will she assent to them."

(iii) Lastly, never will Almighty God take contemplation away from his elect here below, but *will perfect it.* For although death causes the works of the active life to cease, yet neither ceases, nor shall ever cease, the contemplation of God in which consist felicity and life eternal. For, as says St Augustine, "in heaven we shall behold and see, we shall see and love, we shall love and praise; we shall see without end, love without loathing, and praise without weariness" (St Aug., lib. 19, de Civit. Dei); this function, this affection and this exercise will be common to all, in it we shall continue for ever and ever. Amen.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE EXCELLENCY OF THE MIXED LIFE

WITH great mystery does our Lord call the life of Mary a part, being compared with that of Martha, giving us to understand that there is another most excellent life which is composed of these two parts *as a whole*, and comprehends the exercises of both, the contemplative and the active life, especially the most noble which tend to the profit and good of souls.

1. This life Christ our Lord himself chose as the more perfect. It was also practised by the holy Precursor, was imitated by the Apostles and other saints of the Catholic Church, who, like the angels, mounted up on to the very highest rung of the ladder on which Almighty God leaned, and then descended to its foot, at which Jacob lay asleep, to waken and encourage men to the service of their Creator.

2. And although this perfection is very rare and granted to few, yet *all* spiritual persons ought to aspire to it, according to their vocation; inasmuch as the contemplative life, when it is perfected by the love of God, presently engenders a great love of

our neighbour and zeal for his salvation, which, as the holy fathers say, is the most precious gift we can offer to Jesus Christ, becoming his coadjutors in the conquest of souls; and this in such a manner that the selfsame contemplation, in order to accomplish the will of God, interrupts her own works to gain souls which shall love and glorify the same God.

PART II—*continued*

FOR PROFICIENTS IN THE ILLUMINATIVE WAY

B. Of Meditation on the Mysteries of the Passion of Jesus Christ Our Lord

INTRODUCTION

ON MENTAL PRAYER ON THE PASSION OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST

1. Although the meditation of the mysteries of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ belongs, as we have already said, to the *illuminative* way, especially in its highest degree, which approaches most nearly to that called *unitive*, yet it is highly profitable for everyone, in whatever way they walk, and whatever degree of perfection they may have attained. (Cf. St Bonav. in Stim. Div. Amoris, c. i.) For sinners will find in it motives very effectual to purify themselves from all their sins; beginners will be induced to mortify their passions; proficients to increase in all kinds of virtue; and the perfect, to obtain union with Almighty God by fervent love.

2. For this reason, says St Bernard (Serm. in Ser. 4 majoris heb.), the Passion of Jesus Christ, even to the present day causes the

earth to *tremble*, *rends* the rocks, *opens* the sepulchres, and rends the veil of the Temple, dividing it in two, from the top even to the bottom (Matt. xxvii 51, 52). For all those who meditate seriously on the Passion, if through their faults and affections to earthly things they be earth, *tremble* with a holy fear of Almighty God and the severe justice which he executed upon his only Son, being moved thereby to forsake their earthliness. If they be *stones* by the hardness of their hearts, they become soft and tender, and *rend* themselves as if with the greatness of their sorrow, both for their own sins and for the pains which Christ endured for them. If they be sealed "sepulchres" by the shame they feel in making known their sins, they are "opened" by confession, which delivers them from spiritual death and raises them again to newness of life. And finally, that "veil" which hangs as it were between God and man is "rent in twain," so that we may, as St Paul says, contemplate more clearly the glory of our Lord and the bottomless depths of his heavenly secrets. (2 Cor. iii 18.)

3. Not without cause is it said that the veil was rent "from the top to the bottom"; for by this is signified that by means of Christ crucified we may contemplate the height of his divinity and of his sovereign perfections, as well as the depth and profundity of his humanity and of his illustrious and resplendent virtues. So that sinners who, like "urchins" (Ps. ciii 18) are all

thorny through their sins, may find an entrance into this divine rock where, sorrowfully meditating on their sins, the sharp points of their pricking thorns will be blunted and they will be freed from all remorseful and painful pricks. The more pure and unspotted may, like doves, fly higher, and making their nest within the "cleft of the rock" and the "hollow place" of the wall (Cant. ii 14), will become much more pure and beautiful. But the perfect who, like to harts, climb up the high mountains, meditating on Christ highly exalted above the earth, will be very forcibly drawn to have their conversation in heaven. But all alike, says St Bernard, may suck forth "honey out of the rock" and oil out of the hardest stone (Serm. de Pent., Deut. xxxii 13), which though it were hard in bearing injuries, yet more hard in enduring scourges, and hardest of all in bearing the torments of the Cross, yet is made to us a fountain both of oil and honey, that heals our wounds, softens our hardness, strengthens our weakness, and feasts our souls with the sweetness of divine consolations.

4. With great reason therefore does Albertus Magnus say (Rosetum spirit. exercit. xxii c. 1) that the simple remembrance and devout meditation of the Passion of Jesus Christ is much more profitable for a man than to fast for a whole year upon bread and water, to take the discipline every day even to blood, or to recite daily the whole psalter.

For these exercises, though good and profitable, are yet only exterior works, and if taken alone are not so powerful to purify the soul from vices, to enlighten it with truths and virtues, to perfect it by inflamed affections of divine love as is the attentive and profound meditation of the Passion of Christ our Lord. For it is able to work all these effects in our souls, giving moreover spirit and life to penances and exterior actions, to the fervent and courageous performance of which it draws us with great efficacy.

CHAPTER I

ON THE END WE SHOULD SET BEFORE OURSELVES IN MEDITATING ON THE PASSION

1. FROM what we have already said it may evidently be deduced that as the persons who meditate on the Passion of Christ our Lord are of many different kinds, so the *end and scope of their desires* in undertaking such meditation *are also different.* Each one aims at that affection and spiritual fruit which is conformable to the state of his own soul and to that stage in the spiritual life at which he has arrived. We may say then that he desires either to *purge and purify himself* from sins and disordered passions, or to *adorn himself with heroic virtues*, or *to unite himself to Almighty God* by fervent affections of love and charity, taking for a means to attain all this the affection of compassion, which opens the door to all the others.

2. For this reason we may infer that the *Passion of Christ*, as says St Laurence Justinian, *may serve for matter either of joy or sorrow*, because it may be considered in two different ways.

(i) First, as it is a most singular benefit of

Almighty God: "*In quo divinae miserationis reseratur abyssus, coelorum aperitur janua, charitatis latitudo ostenditur, et quantus sit homo apertissime demonstratur: vile enim esse non potest, quod Filii Dei sanguine comparatur*": "In which the bottomless depth of the divine mercy is disclosed, the gate of heaven is opened, the breadth of charity is manifested, and the esteem which Almighty God makes of man is evidently declared; for that thing cannot be vile which was bought with the blood of the Son of God." (Lib. de triumph. agone Christi, c. 20.) In this way the meditation of the Passion moves us to affection of joy and gladness, as Abraham rejoiced when in the figure of the ram which he sacrificed instead of his son Isaac he beheld in contemplation the death of Jesus Christ, rejoicing in the great good the whole world would receive by it. (Gen. xxii 13.) And Christ our Lord himself in thinking of his Passion, speaking in prophecy in the book of Canticles, called this day on which his mother the synagogue crowned him with a crown of thorns, the "day of his espousals" and "the day of the joy of his heart" (Cant. iii 11); and therefore he entered into Jerusalem with great signs of joy to receive this crown, and to celebrate on the bedchamber of the Cross his espousals with his Church. This kind of meditation is most proper to those who walk in the unitive way, considering the Passion as one of those

divine benefits of which we shall speak more fully later on.

(ii) The other manner of meditating on the Passion of which we shall principally treat at present, is inasmuch as it was *bitter and very painful* to our Lord; that it was occasioned by our sins; and that it was a model of all virtues, especially of such as shine amid the greatest afflictions. After this manner it moves us to sorrow and compassion for that Lord who suffered so much for our sakes. Christ himself was broken, sad and heavy at the mere thought of it, and it is therefore just that we should keep him company in his heaviness, lest he should say of us what we read in the psalm: "I looked for one that would grieve together with me, but there was none; and for one that would comfort me, and I found none." (Ps. lxviii 21.)

That it may be understood what sort of compassion this ought to be, and to what end we should desire to experience it, I premise that Christ our Lord drank the cup of his Passion in two manners. The one was *corporally*, by the hands of the cruel soldiers and tormentors, when he was apprehended, scourged, crowned with thorns and crucified. The other was *spiritually*, by a lively imagination and representation in his mind of these same torments, and of the cause of them, namely, our sins. Of both of which his Majesty made mention, speaking to the sons of Zebedee, saying to them: "Can you

drink of the chalice that I shall drink?" (Matt. xx 22.) Here he is speaking of the corporal drink of which he was to taste. But St Mark relates it in the present tense, as if he were drinking it at that very time, saying: "Can you drink of the chalice that I drink of, and be baptised with the baptism wherewith I am baptised?" (Mark x 38.) Here he is speaking of the spiritual potion or drink which he drank every day, although he drank it with much greater bitterness in the garden of Gethsemane, where in anticipation he was scourged, crowned with thorns and crucified: in both manners of drinking this chalice most eminent virtues shone forth, as we shall hereafter see. From this we may learn the *ends* we should have in view in these meditations, and the *fruits* we may gather from them, which are *to unite and conform us to Christ*, afflicted in the two manners of which we have spoken, drinking also, in both ways and according to our own manner, the bitter chalice of his Passion.

(a) First, endeavouring in our meditation to "let this mind be in us," as St Paul says, "which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. ii 5), arousing the *affections of compassion*, sorrow and sadness in such a manner that we become "transformed" into Christ, sad and afflicted for our sakes, and *spiritually* crucified with him. In this manner did the most holy Virgin feel the sorrows of her Son: for which cause Simeon said: "that through her own soul a sword should pierce" (Luke

ii 35); not corporally, but spiritually, by compassion and sorrow. This manner of feeling the Passion of Christ is a special gift of the same Lord, who gives eyes to see his pains and to deplore them. For this reason he said by the prophet Zacharias, that he would "pour out upon the inhabitant of Jerusalem and upon the house of David, the spirit of grace and of prayers, and they shall look on him whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for an only son." (Zach. xii 10.) And although this passage is usually explained in another sense and of other tears, which the incredulous Jews will pour forth at the day of judgement, yet it may also be understood of those who receive from Almighty God the spirit of prayer and in virtue of it behold with the eyes of faith him whom they have "crucified by their sins," bitterly deploring his death. (Heb. vi 6.)

From this is apparent the disorder of some persons who, when they meditate on the Passion of Christ, desire to find in it tears and tenderness of heart, seeking principally their own pleasure, enjoyment and consolation. Such devotion, although it may seem to be spiritual, arises nevertheless, as St Bonaventure says (Stim. de Amor., c. 1, *ad finem*), from self-love and is much disordered, for it is a great disorder to desire sweetness amid the bitterness of Christ, and to desire comforts when meditating on his discomforts, which ought not to be meditated but that

we may share in and be made partakers of them. Yet it is true that the bounty of our Lord is so great that to discomfort ourselves with him is not one of the least of comforts.

(b) The second end we are to have in view in these meditations is to *drink the cup of the Passion corporally*, conforming ourselves to Christ our Lord in the *self-same suffering*, finding strength and courage for this and making efficacious resolutions, imposing voluntarily on ourselves some painful exercises such as fastings, disciplines, and other voluntary mortifications. We should also resolve to support patiently and joyfully all such trials as God shall inflict or suffer to fall on us, believing, as St Paul says, that to us it is given not only to believe in Christ but also to suffer something for him. (Phil. i 29.) And so, imitating the same apostle, we should endeavour, when we meditate upon the Passion, to "*bear always in our body the mortification of Jesus*" (2 Cor. iv 10) and the "marks" of Jesus (Gal. vi 17), which are those wounds and pains which afflict our flesh as they afflicted his. In both these manners of meditation then, we may say: "*Christo confixus sum cruci*": "With Christ I am nailed to the cross" (Gal. ii 19), as well by compassion as imitation, in suffering for him as he suffered for me.

3. From this follows the third principal end of these meditations, which is to *conform ourselves with Christ in the heroic virtues he practised*, drinking his chalice as well spirit-

ually as corporally—that is to say in the love of Almighty God, and of men, in zeal for the salvation of souls, in purity of intention, in the affection of obedience, humility, patience, poverty, and in the exterior works of these and other virtues, particularly in contempt of earthly things and the mortification of those affections which stir up and incite us to the pursuit or retaining of them. So that being, as St Peter says, " armed with the same thought " (1 Peter iv 1) of what Jesus Christ has endured, we become in all things like to him. For this the meditation of the Passion serves us for an armour of proof, strong, bright and beautiful, which arms and covers us from head to foot, making us dreadful to devils, terrible to the flesh, admirable to the world, pleasing to the angels and beloved of Almighty God.

CHAPTER II

ON THE DISPOSITIONS WITH WHICH WE SHOULD MEDITATE ON THE PASSION

1. To obtain those ends which we set before ourselves in meditating on the Passion, it is of great importance to *prepare ourselves* in the best manner we possibly can. For although it is always necessary, as the Holy Spirit teaches us, before prayer to "prepare the soul" lest we approach to it as those who "tempt God" (Ecclus. xviii 23), expecting the dews of heaven without having the dispositions necessary for receiving them, yet is this especially important for that prayer and meditation of which the subject is the sorrows and labours of Christ our Lord, for which he prepared himself with great love and requires that they be meditated with much fervour of spirit.

2. I may therefore imagine that he says to me that word of the prophet Jeremias: "Remember my poverty and transgression, the wormwood and the gall": and that I answer him: "I will be mindful and remember and my soul shall languish within me. These things will I think over in my heart, therefore will I hope in him." (Thren. iii 19.) That is, I will *call to mind very particularly*

and with great fervour thy labours and afflictions, feeling them so inwardly that my soul shall languish with excess of grief and sorrow. Not content to think once only of all thy pains, I will repeat them many times and ruminate upon them with great attention and affection, obtaining from them great confidence.

3. The dispositions most profitable for such meditations are most clearly laid down by St Bonaventure, who says: "Debet homo aggredi hoc tam nobile opus *humiliter, confidenter, instanter*, et *cum quanta potest cordis sui munditia*": "A man ought to take in hand this noble work, *humbly, confidently, earnestly*, and with the *greatest purity of heart* that he possibly can:" (Stim. div. amor., c. vi). Here he speaks of four principal virtues which greatly dispose us to obtain from Almighty God the gifts and graces he is wont to impart to those who exercise themselves in meditation on the Passion.

(i) The first is *humility of heart*, beginning our meditation with shame and confusion for our sins; not only because the "just is the first accuser of himself" (Prov. xviii 17) in general, but in particular, because our sins are the cause of the torments of Christ whom we behold and contemplate. For if a father were imprisoned in a dungeon, shackled and fettered, in company with thieves and suffering grievous sorrows and disgrace, not for his own but for his son's offences . . . if the son were to visit him in his

prison, doubtless he would enter with great humility, shame and confusion for having caused his father to suffer such torments. Such humility will show itself exteriorly in our dress and behaviour. It also belongs to perfect humility to acknowledge ourselves unworthy to meditate and feel these mysteries, deeming it a special favour Almighty God affords to his best-beloved friends. For he shared his sorrows with three of his apostles in the garden and granted to his mother, St John the Evangelist and St Mary Magdalen to be present with him on Mount Calvary when he hung on the cross. This special grace is only given to the humble because, as it is written in Job, the proud "shall fear him and all that seem to themselves to be wise shall not dare to behold him" (Job xxxvii 24), that is, it is not granted to them to contemplate Almighty God according to the greatness of his divinity nor in spirit to consider him according to the humiliations of his humanity.

(ii) The second disposition is *great confidence in the mercy of Christ our Lord*, that since he has vouchsafed to suffer so much for the love of us, he will also grant us to suffer together with him, so that from the meditation of his labours we may draw the fruit for which they were ordained. And so, coupling humility with confidence, I will beg this grace of him, alleging three reasons for which I hope to be heard: (*a*) the Passion itself which he suffered; (*b*) his compassion

for sinners, making himself their advocate and praying for them, that the fruits of his Passion might not be lost; (*c*) his liberality towards a great sinner, that is, the good thief, who besought him with humility and confidence to "remember" him when he "came into his kingdom" (Luke xxiii 42) and obtained so much more than he had asked. But I, says St Laurence Justinian, after I have confessed myself a sinner like the thief, I will speak to my Lord nailed to the cross and say to him with great humility and confidence: "Lord, remember me, not only that I may go into thy kingdom, but also that I may have compassion upon thy sorrows and may participate in thy Passion" (Serm. de Pass.): for well I know that if I have part with thee in suffering, I shall also have part with thee in thy kingdom. Upon such considerations as these we should ground our confidence in Jesus Christ, which, says St Bernard: "the greater it is, the more capable it makes us of divine favours, the vessel of the heart being emptied of itself by humility, the better to receive them." (Serm. 32 in Cant.)

(iii) The third disposition is great *fervour and diligence* in this holy work of prayer; for it would be very shameful to meditate faintly or coldly that which Christ suffered with such intense love. This fervour we must show by making our meditation very attentively, profoundly and devoutly, driving out of the memory all distractions, out of the

mind all dullness and sleepiness, as far as we can, and out of the will coldness of affections, endeavouring to make them very fervent like those of Christ our Lord, and making a generous determination to accompany him: not sleeping like the three apostles in the garden, but watching as he watched, and praying with that agony, earnestness and perseverance with which he prayed, spending in it some whole hours, if possible, in imitation of him.

(iv) The fourth disposition is *purity of heart*, taking care to purge it, and to preserve it free from all sin, so that entering pure into prayer, I may abide in it with great confidence, without remorse, and well-disposed to receive the gifts of Almighty God, and the fruits of his most precious blood: for no man of sense will pour a precious liquor into a foul and defiled vessel. Wherefore, says St Bernard, since the benediction is so ample, prepare pure vessels in which to receive it, devout souls, vigilant spirits, well-ordered affections, pure consciences, into which may be infused all such graces as are there communicated. (Serm. in fer. quart. Heb. Penosae.)

These are the dispositions we ought to bring to the meditation of these mysteries: but let no one leave it because he is without them; for meditation will enkindle the desire of them as it also moves to the acquisition of other virtues.

CHAPTER III

ON THE DIFFERENT MANNERS OF MEDITATING ON THE PASSION

1. To prevent the weariness which our tepidity often finds in meditating the same thing in the same manner, it is well to know the different ways there are of meditating on the Passion besides those of which we have already spoken, that is, either as beneficial to us or as painful to Christ.

There are then two other very excellent methods, which may be compared to the manner in which banquets are served: (i) first, by *placing every dish apart by itself*, and having eaten of that, then setting on another; (ii) the other, by setting on several dishes all together, and taking a morsel of every one, according to the appetite or necessity of him who is eating; even so, in this spiritual banquet of the *mysteries of the Passion*, there are two manners of *eating them spiritually*.

(i) The first, and most ordinary is, meditating every mystery *apart by itself*, pondering in every one what is worthy of consideration, according to the *order of history*; especially fixing our eyes upon these four things: (*a*) beholding the persons engaged, as well those

of Christ and his blessed Mother with his disciples, as those of his persecutors, pondering the conditions and qualities of each one. (St Ignat. in 1 exer. 3 hebd.) (*b*) Moreover, to weigh the *words* they speak, (*c*) the *actions* they do, learning from those of Christ our Lord what is profitable for us, and shunning the evil said and done by his persecutors. (*d*) Finally, beholding *what Christ suffers*, pondering how *his divinity hides itself*, not destroying his enemies, but permitting them to torment his sacred humanity. Whence I may discover what I myself should do and suffer for love of him who did and suffered so much for love of me, and entering into colloquies with God our Lord.

(ii) The second way of meditating these mysteries is when, retaining them all in memory, we take for matter of meditation *some particular pain or virtue of Christ our Lord*, pondering all its circumstances in all the passages of the Passion.

(*a*) If, for example, I desire to meditate the humility of Christ our Lord, I will weigh and ponder the acts of this virtue which he practised throughout the whole course of his Passion. First, when he washed the feet of his apostles; secondly, when he was apprehended, and was for contempt trodden under the feet of his enemies, proceeding thus even to those which he exercised upon the cross itself. Or if I so desire, I may begin my contemplation with those acts of humility which he exercised in all the stages of his

life in his nativity, infancy, preaching, and so on, drawing from them motives to induce me to the practice of the same. And in the same manner may be meditated the obedience, charity or patience of our Saviour.

(*b*) In the same way may be taken for matter of meditation *any kind of particular pains, torment or dishonour*, going through all the mysteries of the Passion, pondering only what concerns that pain in particular. Thus we may meditate how many times he was with great ignominy stripped naked; how many times he shed his precious blood; the station which he made during that time; the shame he endured with regard to his virtue or wisdom, endeavouring in every one of these to take compassion on my Saviour, and to encourage myself to endure somewhat for him in that same kind of suffering. At other times I may take for meditation the particular pain our Lord endured in some one of his members or senses; for example, to meditate the pains of his holy hands, being bound when he was taken prisoner, again tied to the pillar, lastly when they were nailed to the cross, and so of the rest.

2. To these two manners of meditating the Passion may be added that of applying the *interior senses of the soul* to each mystery, without much discourse.

(i) To *behold* with *the eyes* of the soul the bodily form of Christ our Lord, enough to move the hardest heart in the world to compassion. Also his holy soul, so surpassingly

beautiful, yet so afflicted: both admiring and being filled with compassion at seeing the *brightness* and *glory* of the Father, and the *figure of his substance* (Heb. i 3) so disfigured for my sins.

(ii) To *hear* interiorly the words of our Blessed Lord, so kind and affectionate; the importunate clamours against him; the fury of his enemies; the noise of the blows, whips and hammers; feeling in my heart what Jesus Christ felt in his.

(iii) To *smell* with the interior faculty not only the foul odour of sin, which caused the death of this High Priest, but also the sweetness of the sacrifice which he offered for us and of the virtues which he exercised in this devout oblation of his Passion; pondering how by it he appeased the anger of his eternal Father; setting before us for a sign of reconciliation, not the rainbow which is formed in the clouds, but his Son extended like a bow upon the cross, and raining blood for love of us.

(iv) To *taste* the bitterness and gall of our Lord, and so to feel bitterness and sorrow, as if I tasted them corporally; as also to taste that sweetness of love with which he suffered them: as well as that which Almighty God communicates to those who suffer something for his sake, marvelling to see so great sweetness mingled with such great bitterness.

(v) To *touch* with the interior touch of the soul those dreadful instruments of our Lord's

Passion ; the rigour and severity of the cords, scourges, thorns, cross and nails, feeling in my soul that which our Lord Jesus sensibly felt in his blessed body, and exciting those affections which are wont to arise from such considerations.

PART III

FOR THE PERFECT IN THE UNITIVE WAY

THE MEDITATION OF THE MYSTERIES OF CHRIST OUR LORD GLORIFIED

CHAPTER I

ON UNION WITH ALMIGHTY GOD, WHICH IS THE END OF THE UNITIVE WAY

1. THE meditations which are most appropriate to those who have entered upon the way we call *unitive* have for their end that union with God our Lord of which the apostle St Paul says: "He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit" (1 Cor. vi 17.) And although this union belongs peculiarly to the *perfect*, yet all ought to aspire to, and exercise themselves in it, even new beginners. That this may be better understood, I presuppose that this union comprises three particular acts.

(i) The first is the *union of the understanding*, the office of which is to carry God within itself and establish him in the memory, thinking of him and knowing him with a true, accurate, entire and perfect knowledge, so as to become an image and living copy or likeness of God himself, into whom it is transformed, according to that saying of the Apostle: "We all beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord with open face," not veiled like that of Moses, "are transformed into the same image from glory unto glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. iii 18.) In these words St Paul teaches us that the

meditation and contemplation of the glorious things of Almighty God have no other aim than to produce a knowledge and living image of them in us, so that whatever God has glorious in himself, we may possess the same in ourselves by knowledge, endeavouring to have it daily more distinct and clear.

(ii) From this knowledge proceeds a second act of union, the *union of the will*, which is carried out of itself with great violence to embrace that good which it has discovered by the working of the understanding, loving it, delighting in it, and desiring with the greatest possible eagerness to enjoy it. This union is that spoken of in the first and highest commandment of love, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength." (Deut. vi 5; Luke x 27.) In these words is enjoined upon us a love so perfect and excellent as to draw after it all our affections and desires, and transfer them to Almighty God with the greatest and most uninterrupted intensity possible. The affections which spring from this union, and in which those ought to exercise themselves who aim at it by means of the meditations we are now to consider, are the following: admiration of the majesty of Almighty God, of his perfections, and of his wonderful works; joy that he is what he is, and that he has in him so many excellences, and does so many glorious things; *praise* and *thanksgiving* for the gifts which

proceed from him; an inward *desire* to see and possess him, and to be always united with him; very ardent desires also to honour and obey him with a determination to please him in all things, and that all men may know, love and serve him; a fervent zeal for his glory and the *salvation of souls*, accompanied by a great sorrow for the offences that are committed against him; *confidence* in his bounty and providence; *fear* of his justice—not that servile and abject fear "which perfect charity casteth out" (1 John iv 18), but that filial, reverential fear which dreads to be separated from Almighty God or to do anything that may offend him, even in a matter of very small importance; and to this affection must be united that *sorrow for sins* which proceeds from *pure love*, for, as we have already said, the higher degree of sanctity always exercises the acts of the lower, though in a more perfect manner.

(iii) From this union results a third, the union of *resemblance*, consisting in imitation of life and manners, grounded on a perfect conformity with the divine will, and a readiness to will or not to will that which Almighty God wills or does not will, in all circumstances, as well adverse as prosperous. Hence proceeds the continual exercise of all virtues belonging to the perfection of a Christian life, and thus that highest degree is attained to which Christ our Lord exhorted us when he said: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect"

(Matt. v 48); that is, be ye pure, charitable, merciful, prudent, just, temperate and holy as is your Father who is in heaven. And in this way is perfectly accomplished that saying of the Apostle: "We, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image." (2 Cor. iii 18.) For by receiving the glorious virtues of God himself into our souls, we are made like to his glorious divinity and pass from one brightness to another brightness; from the brightness of *knowledge* to the brightness of *affection*, and from this brightness to the brightness of *virtues*, ascending from one virtue to another until we clearly see the God of gods in his mountain of Sion. (Ps. lxxxiii 8.)

2. From what has been said, it follows that the contemplative life, when perfect, embraces these three sorts of union which are linked together in such a brotherly manner that the one greatly helps and advances the other. (St Th. 2, q. clxxxvi, art. 1.) For the knowledge of Almighty God leads to the love of him, and this to the imitation of his virtues; this love and imitation bring the understanding to a wonderful perfection. For, as masters of the spiritual life commonly say, there are two means of knowing Almighty God: (i) the *speculative*, which proceeds from the natural light of our understanding when it is enlightened by the holy light of faith, and ascends by reasoning and meditation to

contemplate the glory and excellence of Almighty God in the things which it beholds in creation, or which are revealed in Holy Scripture, which are, as it were, two mirrors for discerning God in this life; (ii) the *practical* or *experimental*, which proceeds from that most excellent gift of the Holy Ghost called *wisdom* or, as the word *sapientia* implies, a knowledge of God by taste. This, as we have already said, is grounded on the wonderful sense of the charity and love of God which we experience in our souls by heavenly illuminations and sweet affections. (St Dion. De Divin. Nom. c. 2; St Bon. de 7 Itin. Gers. 3 p.; Tract. de Myst. Theol. St Bern., ser. 23 and 24 in Cant., etc.) Of this knowledge David said, "Taste and see that the Lord is sweet" (Ps. xxxiii 9); prove by experience the sweetness of Almighty God and his wonderful operations, for by this means you will be able to see him as far as is possible in this mortal life. The Apostle also exhorts us to be "rooted and founded in charity" (Eph. iii 17), and to devote ourselves to the sweet practice of it, that so we may "comprehend"—that is, palpably touch and feel by experience—the greatness of God, the *breadth* of his charity, the *length* of his eternity, the *height* of his divine being, and the *depth* of his wisdom, to know also the excessive charity of Jesus Christ which far "surpasses all knowledge" that the human understanding can attain to. And by virtue of this sublime and sovereign knowledge we

shall be "filled unto all the fulness" of Almighty God, and transformed into him by a perfect union; as the wise man speaking to God says: "to know thee is perfect justice; and to know thy justice and thy power is the root of immortality." (Sap. xv 3.) For immortal and eternal life proceeds from the knowledge of the eternal God, the love of him and the imitation of his holy virtues. "He that loveth not knoweth not God," says St John, "for God is charity" (1 John iv 8), and uncreated charity can only be known by experiencing in ourselves the acts and effects of created charity, just as the strength and sweetness of wine and honey cannot be well known until they have been tasted. (Cass. Col., 12 c. 13; St Th. 2, 2, q. xcvii, art. 2 ad 3.) So also St Thomas teaches that it is lawful to desire to know God in this manner and to prove his bounty and his "good, acceptable and perfect will" (Rom. xii 2), in order not to err a jot from it.

3. From this we may easily understand the principal purpose of the meditations of which we are about to speak, which are directed towards the first knowledge of God, i.e. the speculative; from this we may proceed to experimental knowledge and enjoy union with his infinite goodness and will in the way we have described. Although it is true that this contemplation and union have for their object the divinity and perfections of Almighty God, with whom we are thus made one spirit (St Th. 2, 2, q. clxxx,

art. 4), yet they have also relation to the same God Incarnate and his glorious works and virtues, in which the divine perfections shine with great brilliance. "Life everlasting," our same Lord says, consists in this; not only "that they may know thee the only true God," but also "Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent" (John xvii 3), the Saviour of the world. And those who would exclude from contemplation the mysteries of his sacred humanity will themselves be excluded from enjoying the blessings of life eternal, for he himself has said: "I am the door; by me, if any man enter in, he shall be saved; and he shall go in and go out, and shall find pasture" (John x 3); that is, I in my human nature am the door by which to enter to Almighty God; if any man enter in by me, believing in me with a vivid faith, as well as in my Father, he shall obtain health and everlasting life—he shall go in and go out, proceeding from the consideration of the mysteries of my humanity to the sublime secrets of my divinity, and from these he shall return again to the first, and shall find in them all the spiritual pasture of devotion for his soul.

4. The life of Christ our Lord comprises two parts: one *mortal and passible*, the meditation of which we have spoken of in the preceding pages; the other *immortal and impassible*, which commenced upon the day of his glorious resurrection and which he still leads, in which the glorious perfections

of his divinity shine most conspicuously. For although, as St Paul says, "He was crucified through weakness, yet he lives by the power of God" (2 Cor. xiii 4); and hence it is that meditation on the glorious life of Christ our Lord belongs principally to the perfect who have already made his earthly life the subject of their prayer. In their name the same apostle speaks, saying: "We have known Christ according to the flesh, but now we know him so no longer" (2 Cor. v 16); that is, as St Thomas explains it, although we have hitherto known Christ clothed with mortal flesh, and subject to the miseries of our mortal body, and loved him with a love mixed with some carnal affection, yet now we no longer know or love him in this manner, but contemplate him clothed in flesh wholly immortal and glorious, and love him with a pure love, free from all taint of flesh and blood. (Lect. 4.)

CHAPTER II

ON THE FERVENT AFFECTIONS OF LOVE AND GRATITUDE WHICH SHOULD ACCOMPANY THESE MEDITATIONS

1. THE meditations of which we have hitherto spoken have been principally on the mysteries which belong to the sacred humanity of Jesus Christ our Lord, and to the works he wrought in and through it. But those of which we are now to speak will concern themselves chiefly with those mysteries which appertain to the Divinity and Trinity of Almighty God, and to those which proceed from him for the benefit of mankind; to these, by reason of their interconnection, will be added some belonging to the humanity. Although, as says St Thomas (2, 2, q. xxii, art. 3, maxime ad 2; et cviii, art. 4), these latter are more suited to the weakness of our nature, yet those of the divinity are in themselves more excellent. On them the Angels feed and the spirits of the Blessed, as also those perfect men who dwell in bodies here below, but whose conversation is already in heaven. These, by continual meditation and contemplation of heavenly things, continually increase and perfect that burning love of Almighty God and that perfect union with

him which is the end and fulness of the unitive way, as was said in the last chapter.

2. This was extremely well put by St Basil, answering a question proposed to him by his monks, who desired to know with what affection they were to serve Almighty God, and in what this affection consists. To whom he answered in these words: The good affection of the soul I suppose to be a vehement desire of pleasing God, and that insatiable, stable and immovable; it is obtained by a vigilant and continual contemplation of the greatness of the glory of Almighty God, with a grateful and frequent remembrance of his benefits, whereby that is engendered in the soul: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind," as he did who said: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul panteth for thee, O God." With such affection of mind as this, therefore, is God to be served, and those things to be performed of which he spoke by his apostle: "Who then shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or persecution, or the sword?" (St Basil in Reg. Brev., clxxv.) In these words the holy doctor teaches us briefly the principal end of the contemplative life in its highest degree and the chief means to obtain it and its fruit. He also declares the perfection with which the works of the active life are to be performed, viz. by join-

ing with them inward devotion and fervour of spirit, which consists in a great affection to everything belonging to the service of God, with a desire to please him in them, not the world, nor our flesh, nor ourselves, but God alone and for his love, accompanying our desire with these four conditions: (i) that it be not lukewarm nor remiss, like that of the slothful, which goes no further than desire, and ends, as says the Holy Ghost, in torment and death (Prov. xxi 25), but that it be *vehement*, strong and effectual, such as the desire of the fervent is, which brings forth works, doing them with integrity and perfection; (ii) that it be *insatiable*, that is, not content with the little it does or suffers, although it spare itself in nothing, but that its desire extend to a great deal more; so that it not only feels no irksomeness or loathing for good works, but has so great a hunger that it is never satisfied with them, a desire like "fire, which never says, it is enough." (Prov. xxx 16.) (iii) That it be *stable*—not changeable, fleeting from one thing to another like the slothful, of whom the Holy Ghost says: "the sluggard willeth and willeth not." For with levity he attempts various exercises of virtue, leaving off some for weariness and then beginning others, without firmness or stability, which is very necessary in order to attain the summit of perfection; (iv) that it be *constant and that he persevere in it till death*, without slackening or becoming lukewarm either

through temptation or persecution, opposing invincible valour and courage, in the same way as the thirsty hart breaks through bushes and briars, running on till he finds some fountain of water at which he may quench his thirst. The desire with which Christ our Lord fulfilled the desire of his Father for our redemption had all these qualities, and this sole consideration is sufficient to rouse in us similar affections, since there is every reason for the disciple to imitate his Master, and it is most just that I employ myself in his service with the same affection with which he devoted himself to serve and profit me.

3. But leaving this consideration, on which we have already said much, the glorious St Basil here gives us two others, very much to our present purpose, by which, little by little, this affection is obtained. (i) The first is the contemplation of the greatness of God, his excellences and perfections, for which he is worthy to be beloved, praised, served and obeyed, with a kind of infinite affection, if it were possible. As this is beyond our reach, we must still strive to attain to the most vehement, insatiable, constant, persevering love that we can, as says Ecclesiasticus: "Glorify the Lord as much as you can, for he will yet far exceed, and his magnificence is wonderful." (Ecclus. xliii 32.) (ii) The second is the contemplation of the innumerable benefits which we receive from his holy hand, which he gives with a love so vehement, insatiable and constant that

he is never wearied with doing us good nor satisfied with giving us his gifts, nor will he ever cease to bestow them upon us for all eternity. Thus gratitude obliges us to desire to repay his infinite benefits with infinite services, if it were possible, since all we can do is but little to repay the immense debt we owe him.

4. Hence this holy doctor infers that these considerations will engender in the soul that perfection of love with which our God desires to be loved when he commands us to love him with our whole heart, our whole soul, with our whole mind, and with all our strength, so that all our powers, both interior and exterior, all the senses and members of our body should continually be occupied in such a manner that they are all engaged in the love of God, concurring in the work with insatiable vehemence and perseverance. For the memory and understanding only love when they remember, think and ponder the things that provoke to love. (St Th. 2, 2, q. xliv, art. 4 et 5.) The imagination and the appetities of the soul likewise love when they bud forth imaginations and affections which awaken and give life to love. The senses love when the eyes, ears, tongue and taste only desire to see, hear, taste and speak of those things which are directed to this love ; and all the members of the body love when they all serve in works of the love of God. And finally, all our powers love when they all employ themselves in loving God with all the intensity of which they are

capable, and in overcoming the difficulties that oppose them and resisting the temptations which divert them from loving. In this way charity may be so rooted in the soul that nothing created can separate them, nor the waters of many tribulations drown its flames (Eph. iii 17; Rom. viii 39; Cant. viii 7); but they may increase and ascend so high that they may move us to imitate the heroic and exemplary virtues of the divinity, after the same manner as Christ our Lord, as he was man, imitated them. For with great reason might he say to us, "Be ye followers of me as I am of my Father."

5. All this the unitive way embraces; for although it is true that love and affection, as we have said, is the gracious gift of the Holy Ghost, who is wont to bring some of his elect without many preceding considerations into the "cellar" of his wine, and there to inebriate them with his love and delight them with the experimental knowledge of his immense charity; yet for our part, assisted by his help, we approach to this cellar on the wings of these two kinds of meditations, viz. of the perfections of God and his benefits. And on account of the connection which exists between them, these two kinds of meditations are so intermingled, seeing that in this life we cannot know the greatness of Almighty God but through his works and from his benefits and gifts, that we cannot always keep them apart, nor is this of any consequence.

CHAPTER III

ON THE MANNER OF MEDITATING THE DIVINE BENEFITS WITH AFFECTIONS OF GRATITUDE

1. It now remains to set down in what manner we should meditate upon the divine benefits; five things are principally to be considered in order to know their infinite number and greatness, and to be as grateful for them as we ought.

(i) First, the *infinite greatness of the benefactor*, who is God; from this it follows that every gift, however little it may appear, is yet greatly to be esteemed, because he who gives it is infinitely great. Thus David said: "I will extol thee, O God, my King, and I will bless thy name for ever, yea, for ever and ever. Great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised, and of his greatness there is no end." (Ps. xlvii 1; Ecclus. xliii 31.)

(ii) Secondly, the *infinite greatness of the love with which he bestows the benefit*, which for this cause is very greatly to be esteemed. For giving the gift with love, together with the gift, he gives himself, and enters himself into the thing he loves, so that, whatever he gives, although the thing be very little in itself, yet he gives it in such a manner that

he desires to give others much greater. Thus did he speak to David, by the mouth of Nathan: "If these things be little" which I have bestowed upon thee, "I shall add far greater things unto thee" (2 Reg. xii 8); because neither power nor will is wanting in him.

(iii) Thirdly, the *greatness of the benefits themselves*, which after a certain manner, are likewise infinite, both in number and excellence. For some benefits there are which comprise innumerable goods, such as the creation and preservation of the world, and his providence over it. Others there are of infinite excellence, such as the Incarnation, Redemption, the institution of the Blessed Sacrament and glorification, for all of which our thanks are due. This we may read in Isaias: "I will remember the tender mercies of the Lord for all the things that the Lord hath bestowed upon us, and for the multitude of his good things to the house of Israel, which he hath given them according to his kindness." (Isa. lxiii 7.) St Bernard also says: "No gifts of our great God ought to be passed over by us without praise and thanksgiving, *Non grandia, non mediocra, non pusilla:* "Neither great, nor mean, nor those that are little" (Serm. in Cant. li), "for the little are infinite in number, and though they be small compared with others, yet in themselves they are great."

(iv) Fourthly, the *infinite baseness of the person on whom the benefit is bestowed*, who is

a miserable, contemptible and ungrateful man, truly unworthy that Almighty God should confer any benefit upon him or be mindful of him at all. For this cause holy David said: "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?" "Man is like to vanity; his days pass away like a shadow." (Ps. viii 5; Ps. cxliii 3.) Whence I may gather that comparing my baseness with the greatness of Almighty God, I am unworthy to take his praises into my vile mouth, saying with St Augustine: "Who am I, O my God, that presume to praise thee? I am dust and ashes, a dead corpse, worms and rottenness; how therefore, shall darkness praise light, death life, or a worm his infinite Creator?" (In Soliloq., cap. 10.)

(v) Fifthly, the *infinite liberality of God*, in bestowing the benefit, giving it gratis and freely, expecting no profit from the recipient, who not only does not deserve it, but is infinitely undeserving for his innumerable sins and ingratitudes; so that although he may be an enemy of God, yet God never wearies of bestowing infinite benefits on him, and that daily. These five things Christ our Lord taught us to ponder, calling to memory the benefit of the Incarnation, saying: "God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son" (John iii 16); which sentence contains five words, each of which deserves to be well considered. For he that gave the benefit is an infinite God. The manner was

by loving. The recipient is the world, full of abominations. The benefit was his only-begotten Son, even as infinite as himself. And he gave him gratis, without any merit on our part, wherefore he says: "He *gave* his only-begotten Son."

2. Pondering therefore these five points in every divine benefit, we owe God due thanks for each. To this, says St Thomas, we are inclined first, by the virtue of gratitude, for God is the first and supreme benefactor, towards whom we ought to exercise three special acts of gratitude, viz. to acknowledge and greatly esteem the gift itself, for the reasons before alleged; to praise him for it, publishing incessantly his liberality, that all may praise and glorify him; and lastly, to do him some services, not for reward but gratis, not in expectation of new benefits, but for those we have already received. And finally, our gratitude ought to be "for all things," according to the counsel of St Paul (1 Thess. v 18; 1 Tim. ii 1); not only for those I receive myself, but for those which all other creatures likewise receive.

3. It is to be noted that there are three kinds of creatures, some of whom both *can and will* render thanks to our great God for his benefits, requiting their debt according to their power; such are the Angels and saints in heaven, the souls in purgatory, and the just on earth. Others there are that *can but will not* return thanks, either from

ignorance, as idolaters and other infidels who know not God, or from malice, such as wicked Christians; amongst whom may also be numbered the devils and the damned, who have received innumerable benefits from God. Other creatures there are who neither *will nor can* be thankful, because they are without understanding. For all these therefore we ought to give thanks, joining with those of the first class, supplying the ignorance and malice of the second and the impotence of the third, at the same time inviting them to praise Almighty God, for by so doing I rather animate myself to praise and glorify him and whet my desire that all should do likewise. Wherefore in every time and place will I praise God, often using those words of St Paul: "Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift." (2 Cor. ix 15.) These words the Church uses frequently at the end of the canonical hours, to excite us to thanksgiving, for, as says St Augustine: "What thing better can we carry in our hearts, utter with our mouths, and write with our pens than '*Deo gratias*': 'God be thanked'? Nothing can be more briefly said, more gladly heard, more easily understood, nor practised with more utility." (Epist. xvii ad Medit.)

4. In all that we have said we have shown the diligence we must on our part employ in these meditations, co-operating with divine grace, in which we must principally trust. We must not confide in our own diligence,

but acknowledge that after we have done all, we are yet unprofitable servants. We have but done what we ought, nor are we worthy of so sweet and sovereign a reward as is the gift of contemplation; it suffices to have endeavoured to obtain it for the glory of that Lord who desires to bestow it, and will do so either in this life, if it be expedient for us, or in the other, where we shall clearly contemplate Almighty God, and love him with all our powers, world without end. Amen.

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A Treatise on Mental Prayer.

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